

The SOUND 6

PROJECTOR

MUSIC MAGAZINE 1999

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CULT
SANDY
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• LUCAS •
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MASONNA



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FESTIVAL OF DRIFTING
SUN RA COMIC STRIP



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♦ RIK RAWLING ♦
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♦ WAR ARROW ♦
♦ JOE BANKS ♦



The Sound Projector Sixth Issue 1999

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Originally published August 1999**

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Page 19 depicts DAPHNE ORAM

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Japan ☹️👁️🔔
Ears ☹️👁️🔔
MAX!MUM
D!STRESS

Optical*8

Bug

GOD MOUNTAIN EUROPE GOCD 011 (ND)

Guh-rooovy!! Overblown superfast pounding LOUD rock music from the finest technicians of this in the field today. I suggest for maximum enjoyment you POWER UP on about 10 bars of Bournville Dark chocolate, down a case of Jolt Cola, and jump about the room listening while you simultaneously play some hyperactive Nintendo punch-up starburst computer game and watch a vid of ULTRA MAN on fast forward. Yep, some listeners may find this intense, crowded music objectionable, but I'm not among them. Pompous and didactic it may be, but it's so utterly convincing...I mean if this CD were an advert for right-wing politics I'd probably be hanging upside down on a meathook by this point, get my drift? Better one day listening to Optical*8 than a hundred days listening to Faith No More...

So many excellent features this CD boasts - a ludicrously dense sound; impossibly fast soloing and playing; insane collage and fast edits; and outright fun-loving silliness offered up without shame or chagrin. I mean the track 'Summer Slave' which quotes both 'Voodoo Chile' and 'Born to Be Wild' without any trace of Guardian-reading Channel-Four viewing irony. And the title track which yawns out 'EACH BUG! EACH BUG! EACH BUG!' and 'Whole Lotta Louse!' with gleeful, buttock-squeezing abandon. Rock music regains its Jupiter-sized bollocks one again, proposing emancipation from a million Human League records and the mealy-mouthed politically correct legacy of the 1980s. Let Optical*8 take you back to a reinvented universe where Robert Fripp is not only emperor of the galaxies, he practically designed the genetic code for the whole human race. Lovely stuff - it delivers 'Mind-Roasting Grooves', as track eight promises. Featuring the great Otomo on turntables, the mad cross-dresser Hoppy Kamiyama, and two other Jap



loons, this one recently came my way thanks to a domestic issue plucked from the aluminium racks at Rough Trade Covent Garden. Recommended, in case my overall enthusiastic tone wasn't clear enough from the above drivel...

ED PINSENT

Boredoms

Super Roots 7

JAPAN, WARNER MUSIC JAPAN INC WPC6-8520 (1998)

Record-buyer, DO NOT hesitate before scooping this din of delight out of the racks, rush it right home and include it in your listening diet on a daily basis thereafter. This, you will find, is a recipe for true peace of mind, great fortune, health and happiness. Boredoms, under the watchful eye of Yamatsuka Eye, have succeeded in making something which may be a perfect record, perhaps the most uplifting record ever made. Why can't English people make music like this? It would be impossible - as a race, we're far too dour, prim, staid, virginal, class-oriented, stodgy, dull, miserable, repressed, obstructive, unimaginative, backward-looking, priggish, pompous, philistine, uneducated, uncultured, dull-witted, untrained and generally useless, to ever achieve a musical statement of this magnitude.

Super Roots 7 is a suite of three or four perfect movements, starting perhaps with a warped version of dance music and swiftly passing into psychedelic jamming and pure one-note jamming that'll speed your weary soul to Heaven on wings of Mercury. Guitars, electronics, flawless drumming, evoking every great record in your memory banks. They make it seem so effortless, yet here are virtually all the transcendent, ecstatic and earth-shaking moments you've ever enjoyed through hearing music, condensed into one perfect 35-40 minute episode. An image, a canonisation, a pattern of rock that redefines the standard. Significant, is it not, that both Otomo and Eye have progressed beyond their early messy, sprawling, noisy, chaotic work: both sensing, I think, that the information-overloaded world they prophesied some years ago has now come true.

Boredoms now, instead of trying to play and say everything at once, now just play and say ONE THING. And what they choose to say is so pure and perfect, you can't help but listen.

Oh dammit, I'm ashamed to be English when I hear this. In fact, it would be nice to become somebody else because I'm so fed up with my own life. This could be one good psychological reason why we listen to music; to create the illusion that things are different, that our enemies can be defeated, that the forces beyond our control can be subdued, that fortunes may be reversed and the disenfranchised may at last join in with the dance of the human race. Oh, brother!

ED PINSENT

Gasaneta

Sooner Or Later

JAPAN, POOR STRONG FACTORY PSFD-17

Loud and shrill punk guitar music with a strong acid-psych influence...recorded in 1978 and undoubtedly a big influence on High Rise. You may wonder why I keep

bothering with this stuff, even writing about an obscure band/musician which may not even be particularly significant, but I'm just a sucker for the Japanese underground. If you played me the exact same record and told me it was by a UK punk or New Wave band from the same era, I expect I wouldn't even get out of bed. Actually it's far better than that suggests, because you get some gorgeous monotonous one-chord strumming and bleating from a rhythm guitar, psychedelic feedback soloing that frequently explodes into completely manic frenzy, and to top it off a string of unintelligible vocal barks, chattering away in

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demented alien gibbon-speak. To round it all off you get this badly recorded garage feel from start to finish, and at least two totally inconsequential tracks where the tape recorder was left running for no apparent reason. It's lovely stuff.

ED PINSENT

Hanatarash

Hanatarash 3
USA, RRR RECORDS,
RRR 049 (1989)

A magnificent, insane energy. Why, there are more ideas in the first five minutes of this CD than...oh, you know how it goes. Hear it and marvel at the sheer mastery of the uncontrollable forces, tornadoes shackled, and tidal waves bound; very dense, penetrative and extreme, an inner space sonic surgery performed with steel gouges and hot needles. Episodic, short bursts of activity (as opposed to the lengthy endurance test of a Merzbow onslaught), this amounts to a sheer delight of modernist deconstruction of rock and performance, executed on the scale of a vast Industrial estate being wrecked and set afire by an enthusiastic, anarchic team of hard-hats armed with sledgehammers. See picture on sleeve for further details. If you want to know how it's done, it's mostly to do with capturing the energy in the very cathartic wild performances, but also in the editing - speeding up tapes, backwards tapes, foreign tapes, looped tapes, collaged tapes, degraded tapes, you name them. But no formal arthouse / concrete experiment this, the only aim is to shock and startle and electrify your ears and brain.

A pre-Boredoms band fronted by the major player Yamatsuka Eye, Hanatarash (or Hanatarashi) have a number of releases dating back to 1982. In their home town of Osaka they once (according to legend) left the gig, stole a small tractor they found in the street, rode it back and demolished the venue they were playing in. Pretty irresponsible, eh? You can't get more Punk Rock than that! The live fragments here, one from 1984, indeed convey just such a joyous release of cataclysmic energy via powerful grunting, shouting, screaming, and childish banging on sheets of metal. Their first two records came out in 1986 and 1987 on the Alchemy label in Japan; this one is via the American RRR label, comes complete with hilarious sleeve note by Seymour Glass of Bananafish / Revolver fame, and was limited to 1000 copies. And there are the usual provocative titles you've all come to love so much, most notoriously 'White Anal Generator', 'Black Hole Maw', 'Young Hate' and 'God-Noise-God'. Says Glass: '...a kind of Mount Fuji of poisonous emotion, always erupting, exploding and scorching with the rhythm of a raging tantrum'. Can't improve on that, really...too bad it's deleted now.

ED PINSENT

Keiji Haino with Boris

Black: Implication Flooding
JAPAN, INOXIA RECORDS IXCD 0002 (1998)

Keiji Haino has turned in not a few collaborative recordings lately that I've read about, but never considered 'em fit to lavish my moolah upon (sheer



apathy) ...they've been with jazzier-improvisers like Derek Bailey, Peter Brötzmann and Barre Phillips, and are probably all great in their semi-acoustic way. This Black Implication Flooding thing however is quite a different barrel of lard, being a team-up with an obscure trio of Japanese Heavy Metal Underground players rejoicing in the name of Boris, and it's a mega-monster. From top to bottom the whole CD is a gothic horror masterpiece, a Hammer horror movie with lashings of blood and vampires, and lesbians cavorting naked in a bubble bath; an unholy rite, an Exorcism; an H P Lovecraft epic of madness and doom; the entire works of Black Sabbath condensed into one intensely sick record.

Sick, sick...this record is diseased. A very heavy bass guitar played by Ohtani overwhelms your head like a thick blanket of rank decay, and propels all the music along with a pulsing dynamic - so every track is like a gigantic worm or snake tunnelling through the sand (ie like in *Tremors*). Wata plays guitar and e-bows, overamped to a blinding degree; joined with Atsuo on drums, some bloody excellent ensemble playing results - and even Keiji isn't showing off too much (of which more in a moment). Sample track 5, 'It should be watched...', for a massive dose of abnormality...you'll hear a truly disturbing concatenation of weird subliminals, howls, strange bending notes, rubbery squelches,

banshees dying slowly in metal tunnels, torturous shrieks - a fine blend of organised chaotic noises. One of many cuts which are a relentless and doom-laden exorcism for all the players - and for you too. Rarely have I heard something that makes me feel so ill. Terrific!



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Keiji Haino's presence is somewhat more, erm...diffused than it has been on other projects - where, let's face it, it's imperative that he be seen as the star. His lead instrument, be it voice or guitar, isn't constantly blundering in, nor is it miked to the front of the mix Paul McCartney style. On the other hand, his poetic bent is discernible in the absurd long titles, which again are very reminiscent of the poetry and prose of H P Lovecraft. Especially my favourite 'Don't be cheated by the oozing silt from both of the accuser and the accused which is always there, saying "something have to be done"'. Good advice for those tricky 'oozing silt' moments in your life...

You could also, perhaps, accuse Haino-san of being a bit pretentious in the choice of instruments for this trip - including a 'wave drum', 'ethnic oboe', and 'Electronic Sruthibox'. Like an exotic traveller boasting he's been everywhere, seems it's part of Keiji's life ambition to put his hands on virtually every type of instrument ever devised by man. But that's not a bad thing. We're on more familiar turf when the guitar comes into play for the last three tracks, and even here he eschews his familiar battery of FX pedals, in favour of some relatively subdued long and loud tones.

Great sleeve art in black and purple, as good as a missing LP by Blue Öyster Cult - looks like a silhouette of Frankenstein's Castle, but instead it's a menacing wall of Marshall amplifiers. Just as scary, as you will find out...

ED PINSENT

Altered States

Altered States 4
JAPAN, ZENBEI RECORD
ZEN-003 (1995)

Altered States 6
JAPAN, ZENBEI RECORD
ZEN-005 (1997)

Souped-up and stripped-down like a hotrod custom car, fuelled on hi-octane progressive rock derivatives, these records speed past your senses, shut down all the competition and knock down anything standing in their way. Highly suitable for modern ears of all persuasion. Main man Uchihashi Kazuhisa (guitar) with Nasuno Mitsuru (bass), Yoshigaki Yasuhiro (drums) maintains one of the best Japanese bands currently producing instrumental guitar music, clearly heavily in debt to 1970s progressive rock and blues-influenced musicians. However this power trio attack their material with such energy and drive, taking everything at full tilt, that any hint of turgidity is dispelled. Everyone should be amazed, particularly the precision and accuracy with which these incredible, very fast runs and riffs are executed. Like High-Rise these guys can take the form of the excessive guitar solo and develop it into a new species of perfectionism, one completely free from any self-indulgence or showing off. *Altered States 6* is nine sumptuous studio tracks cut at Japan's Earth Studio in 1996. *Altered States 4* has little hieroglyphic drawings instead of track titles; it's a live recording of pure electricity and should get all the corpses dancing around at your next zombie jamboree; it comes from a performance at the New York Knitting Factory in 1995. They are a staggeringly good live act as I recall from the LMC Festival in 1997; their crystal-clear sound has a frightening purity which impresses me to this day.

From their own label, Zenbei Record; Fax Japan 81-78-291-8732

ED PINSENT

Dragon Blue

Hades Park
JAPAN, AVANT AVAN 075 (1998)

Modern progressive rock songs rendered for 1990s ears as only the Japanese can do it. Razor-sharp performances and a decent quota of unusual noises here; yet surprisingly a bit ordinary in the final analysis, given the expectations raised by the all-star lineup of contemporary Eastern geniuses. Led and produced by vocalist Tenko, plus Otomo Yoshihide on turntables,

Kato Hideki on bass, Imahori Tsuneo on guitar and Sotoyame Akira on drums.

Otomo isn't in charge here, and he's relegated to the position of adding sampled bursts almost as decorative flourishes to the work; he does this with his characteristic humour, but there isn't really space for anything else. Every other piece steams ahead like an express train, propelled forwards by the non-stop drums and quite breathless vocal spasmodic attacks - Tenko straddles the engine like a triumphant Modesty Blaise escaping her pursuers. There may be some midi-work in here too, perhaps triggered by a guitar synthesiser. One hates to carp too much, as it's all so expertly done, and you won't get music of this quality from anywhere else in the world today. If only there were a little more fire to the Dragon, or a twist of extra weirdness that my system cries out for as a daily requirement. Lovely sleeve art (and nicely printed too); probably one of the best ever from Ikue Mori.

ED PINSENT

Various Artists

The Land of the Rising Noise
USA, CHARNEL HOUSE PRODUCTIONS CHCD-9 (1993)

An old one from six years ago...in fact volume two of this has been out for months already, and volume three is on the way, although when it appears it will be the last ever Charnel House release. Charnel House in San Francisco, along with RRR in Massachusetts, were two American labels to first release Japanese 'noise' and this is an excellent set of twelve tracks compiled by Mason Jones, giving you a taste not just of all-out noiseniks but of somewhat more listenable gobblets of goo. Omoide Hatoba from Osaka are crazy underground rockers, proud of their high insanity levels, as befits a band led by the Boredoms' guitarist, Seiichi Yamamoto. The 1970s

progressive rock influence in Japan is detectable with Angel'in Heavy Syrup, and Children Coup D'Etat (King Crimson and Henry Cow are two obvious ones here) and DMV, whose beautiful over-arching 'Outer Mind' song, with water effects and chanting, comes over like Popol Vuh and Brian Eno. Then you get tracks which are just plain odd, like Agencement's 'Tegmen', a perplexing electronics experiment. Skip ahead to the final five tracks if it's scary noise you're after...here be Merzbow, Tokyo Dowser, the intensely harsh Hijokaidan, and what must be the stand-out track here for me - 'Sound of Bay Area' by C.C.C.C. This is the most chaotic and the most extraordinary music on the comp, heavenly slow and deep noises along with strange disjunctive collage, weird beats, alien passions and great beauty. In 1993 this Yokohama quartet had released Cosmic Coincidence Control Center, and were last spotted by this listener at the Meltdown of Control along with assorted maniacs in London's South Bank in 1998. Also here: Keiji Haino, Dissecting Table, and Aube. With contact addresses, personnel listings and snapshots of personal histories and discographies. Fine sleeve of an androgynous ageless courtesan by Ryoichi Yoshida.

ED PINSENT





MASCHINA
Ejaculation Controller

08
+
-



MASONNA

THE TERROR SHOUT

Well, I have read of the hero shout which the ancient Irish warriors used, that would drive armies backwards; and did not Hector, the Trojan, have a terrible shout? And there were sudden shouts in the woods of Greece. They were ascribed to the god Pan and would infect men with a madness of fear; from this legend indeed the word 'panic' has come into the English language. And I remember another shout in the Mabinogion, in the story of Lludd and Llewelys. It was a shriek that was heard on every May Eve and went through all hearts and so scared them that the men lost their hue and maidens their senses, and the animals and trees, the earth and the waters were left barren. But it was caused by a dragon.'

Robert Graves, *The Shout* (1924)

Masonna, *Ejaculation Generater*
JAPAN, ALCHEMY RECORDS ARCD-087 (1996)

Masonna, *Shinsen Na Clitoris*
JAPAN, VANILLA RECORDS VANILLA-6 (1990)

Masonna, *Beauty Beast*
BLAST FIRST BFFP142CD (1999)

IT WAS CAUSED BY A DRAGON...now here's a true original primitive-sophisticate if ever there did be. If late 20th century man has absorbed every possible permutation of an idea, the ultimate development is to abandon conceptualising and return to the feral roots. It's not enough to say Masonna screams at the top of his voice - the designation 'vocal performer' won't cover it. I've known people faced with Masonna records to burst out laughing, and you probably will too. It's not the laughter of mockery, nor surprised disbelief when faced with such extremity, nor yet your own surprise that you can endure such sonic hell. It's the laugh of the man glimpsing freedom, faced with the astonishing truth of another man who has dared to liberate himself from the shackles of so-called acceptable behaviour, and in so doing has probably re-defined the very limits of excess. You will laugh with joy as you see a fellow prisoner not only escaping from the encampment, but sailing over the barbed wire fence on silver wings as he makes his glorious escape. Better yet if this incredible music can exhort you to make your escape too. Sadly, listening to Masonna's screech alone won't do it - I expect you must find your own voice to screech in also.

Another route of freedom he proposes is naturally enough, sexual freedom - as the blatantly provocative title *Ejaculation Generator* celebrates the sexiness of sheer noise, how it makes your inner being as hard as a massive erect penis, and the all-encompassing volume can envelop you like an enormous sweet cunt, a vast orgasm-inducing blanket of sweetness. The very noise triggers liberating psychoblow release, gets your rocks off and floods of torrential sperm result. Merzbow too has pointed the way here, emulating Salvador Dali and other Surrealists who found unconditional freedom in the excesses of sexual fantasy.

Perhaps seeing Masonna doing it live yields up more answers. Masonna made a rare London appearance at the Garage, February 1999. His live shows are basic; the formula transparently obvious:

1. Present for five minutes on stage, maximum.
 2. Scream unintelligible sweet gibberish into the mic.
 3. Hit FX pedals on the floor with feet by leaping into air like deranged maniac.
 4. Cavort.
 5. Swing microphone lead over head so that you're in danger of hitting somebody.
 6. Assume fetal position.
 7. Scream.
 8. All this rendered at maximum volume and then some.
 9. Finis. Get off stage.
- Now that's what I call a gig!*

Now that's what I call a gig!

A performance like this is a hit of pure musical heroin - he hits you up and hits the road. No black magic mystique to the ceremony, as Keiji Haino would insist on; no cult of personality. Masonna offers you the real thing, 100% uncut. Under the circumstances, can't you see why anything over five minutes would be excessive? A burst of concentrated energy and it sears you for life.

As for these freakin' records, they tend I believe to be edited together from a string of unconnected live shows to produce the effect of a multiple orgasm or a simultaneous dose of treble-strength speedballs. *Ejac* is nearly an hour; *Shinsen* thankfully comes in at less than 30 minutes, but the duration in each case is simply perfect. The first few seconds are impossible to bear: you're winded, a punch in the stomach would do less damage. No use reaching for that volume control; you can't get near the stereo for the rush of the wind. Then: either enlightenment kicks in and you're in for a exhilarating free-fall plunge into the Grand Canyon of noise; or you decide you'd rather be riding inside the cone of a gigantic twister. The choice is yours.

To over-intellectualise: if what Massonna does is some form of logical development of every single screaming sound delivered on stage and on record in the name of rock music, soul music, RnB, or punk rock, then it might seem remarkable no-one has ever dared to try it before. The weird effect it has though is of showing up the hollowness of its predecessors; making even a basic punk rock record seem a bit too *complicated* - too pretentious even, in having lyrics, a story, a verse-chorus structure. Massonna's so wild it makes all previous attempts at wildness seem a

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bit pathetic. It's not just that he does it louder or harder than anyone else - there's something more weird going on here. Then again, you can divorce it from any sense of music history and accept its primitive brutality for what it is - and enjoy it. A scream - what could be more natural, and more simple? But it takes a special person to transform this most primordial of urges into the remarkably expressive art form that we hear documented here.

As to the sleeve art of these three...

✻ *Shinsen Na Clitoris* ✻ ✻ ✻ ✻ ✻

...simply compares a flower to the female genitalia, and also to the smiling mouth with teeth bared - nothing new there, I suppose. A girl's period in a Japanese comic has been likened to red flowers, and how far back does the old castration-fear sharkteeth vagina image go? Nonetheless a dazzlingly fine collage of compacted information. This Vanilla record is a major rarity, suckers. Turn green!

Ejaculation Generater

I seem to recall finding some clues that led me subconsciously back to the world of Hans Bellmer. He was the German surrealist who produced exquisite sculptures of weird dolls in very provocative poses, with impossible limbs. These definitely probe an area of the subconscious you'd rather leave alone, which is good; I'm also reminded of seeing Alice Cooper on TV recently, who claimed his maltreatment of dolls on stage betokened a bad attitude towards dolls, not towards girls. Take note...

Beauty Beast ✻ ✻ ✻ ✻ ✻

A Savage Pencil drawing is magicked into another dimension by the brilliant full-strength primary colours. These tend to coax you into an optical illusion state where background blends with figure until you can't tell them apart, making Masonna an intensely disturbing psychic presence who can exist everywhere at once. In addition, it connects him visually to Psychedelic art (and by extension to the music, and the drugs).

Additional notes ✻ ✻ ✻ ✻ ✻

Besides the Garage, Masonna played another gig at the South Bank this year. My worthy constituent (who owns more Masonna CDs than you have records in your entire collection) reports back the advantages in getting a better view of the screaming man's attacking foot actions - those agile body-swerves, dives and leaps for the pedals demonstrate what an electric physical performance the whole thing is, as much to do with dance, theatre, performance art and body art as it is with music and sound. So if it comes to the aesthetic charms of physical movements, then I personally would rather watch 18 hours of Masonna's wired presence than be subjected to even ten seconds of uncouth jocks playing football, snooker or rugby on the television. In this topsy-turvy world however, we're unlikely to see such imaginative schedules presented as part of the broadcasting services offered to us.

You can see a great picture of Masonna in the *Frieze* magazine article which Russell Haswell put together. He's got such long hair that it can at times obscure his oriental visage, and make him resemble something from the pages of a 16th century Natural History book. I'm still a sucker for the illusory exotica of the East, and I know it's largely a mental construct, but images like this give me a real charge. If I had to choose between this and a video of Hootie and The Blowfish, I think I know which way my instincts would lie.

ED PINSENT



Ejaculation Generater

(as Rik Rawling sees it...)

FIRST CAME MERZBOW (Masmai Akita) and now Masonna (Maso Yamazaki), both solo artists creating MORE noise than every thrash, speed, grind and death metal band put together ever could. At their fingertips entire *Luftwaffes* of B-52s crash into steel mills, icebergs explode in seas of burning acid and Lovecraftian beastgods scream in orgasmic ecstasy as they violate black holes behind suns going supernova. Forever.

Younger than Akita and with seemingly no consideration for the listener's senses, Masonna is a NO PRISONERS performer and possibly the last true sonic terrorist of this century. His stage shows feature himself dressed in Black Sabbath flares, surrounded by effects pedals as he screams into a microphone leaving the audience with bleeding eardrums and none of the major questions answered.

On record the experience is perhaps MORE intense. You can turn the sound down, you can switch it off altogether, but something primal, something deep in the cerebral cortex stays your hand and insists that you listen ALL THE WAY. *Ejaculation Generater*: 32 tracks, barely a half hour long, no track titles and no breaks between the tracks. It is a relentless rush of aural intensity as the noise

switches from distorted kamikaze screams to bursts of amplified static, looped feedback and electro pulse thunder. There seems to be no end to it. Unlike Merzbow there's no discernible 'rhythms' emerging from the chaos, no sense of orchestration - it simply comes at you and comes at you like a herd of buffalo migrating across a vast field of sheet metal.

Then suddenly it falls away to a distant hum. The sudden lurch back to screams and thunder is anticipated at any moment but the near silence goes on and on. For more than a minute. The lack of noise begins to draw the walls in around you and you long for the noise to return, to fill this implosion. Still there is just the hum. Please, make it stop!



A Mack Truck loaded with semtex and Marshall Amps tuned to the frequency of Mars's gravitational field crashes through the wall and suddenly all is well again.

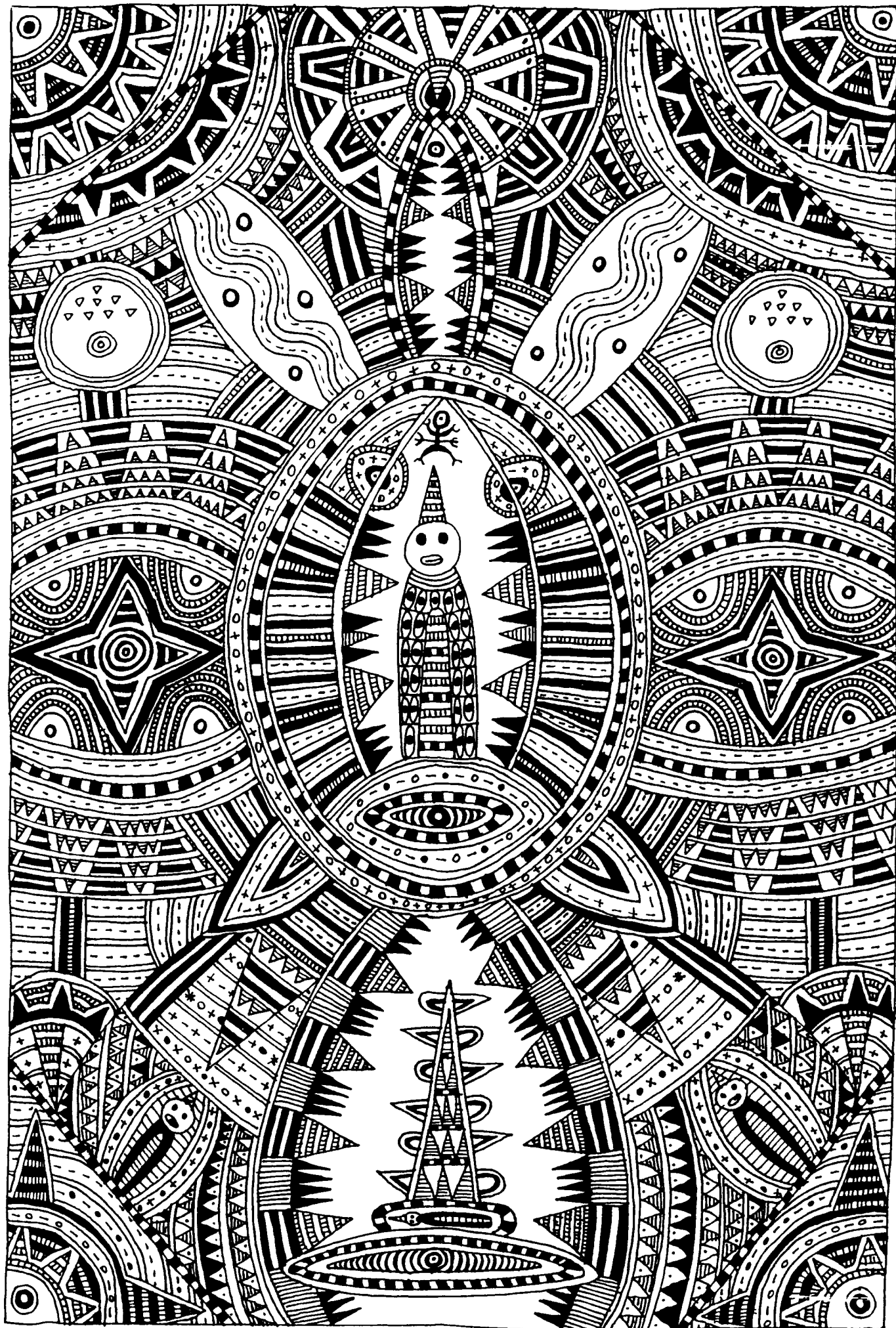
Normality is restored. The hideous silence is gone. The listener is drawn back into the shrieking womb of noise that is the Heat Death of the Universe transmitted from the far future.

This is the loudest and most caustic listening experience that I've ever pitted myself against. All future attempts to go beyond this are futile. All those eager young noise-fiends out there hoping to outdo Masonna are wasting their time. The absolute limit has been reached.

RIK RAWLING







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synthesiser work with Anthony Braxton (eg *Time Zones* in 1976); and there's Joe McPhee's live recording of sax blowing with European John Snyder on the synth, *The Willisau Concert...*

But it's a gauntlet which hasn't been picked up as often as it might. Indeed, in the UK a school of thought emerged that insisted upon nothing other than acoustic recording of an improv performance as it happened, with no post-production. By extension, this seemed to mean little or no live electronic variation would be permitted - although of course there were some exceptions (Bailey and his volume pedal). Apart from the occasional synth player or sampler being admitted to a Company Week bash, few have attempted this live electronic transmutation of another musician's playing. And yet *Secret Measures* is more than simply adding electronic effects to enhance the sound; as Richard Sanderson states on the sleeve note here, it is 'a real time duo recording as valid as any acoustic duo in the improvising sphere'. The rules of this game demand immediate responses, from both players; Durrant is reacting to a sound from Butcher, who in turn has to contribute more to work with the changes Durrant proposes. How can players get closer than this? An uncanny hybrid results, a real blending of the colours in a box of plasticine.

Who better to do this than Phil Durrant, a man with experience in the world of making electro records, including collaboration with Fabio and Grooverider (whoever they may be) on their first single. He has used electronics to modify his own violin playing. However, this recording used a comparatively simple set up, modelled more on the equipment that David Tudor (John Cage's partner in crime) used to modulate live piano performances...only partially controllable. Wisely, Durrant also eschews live samples (which would only lead down the Stockhausen and Walkman cul-de-sac). Startling and powerful, this is a truly excellent record. If they ever put a drum beat behind it then current media darlings like Add N to X might start looking for another job (let's hope).

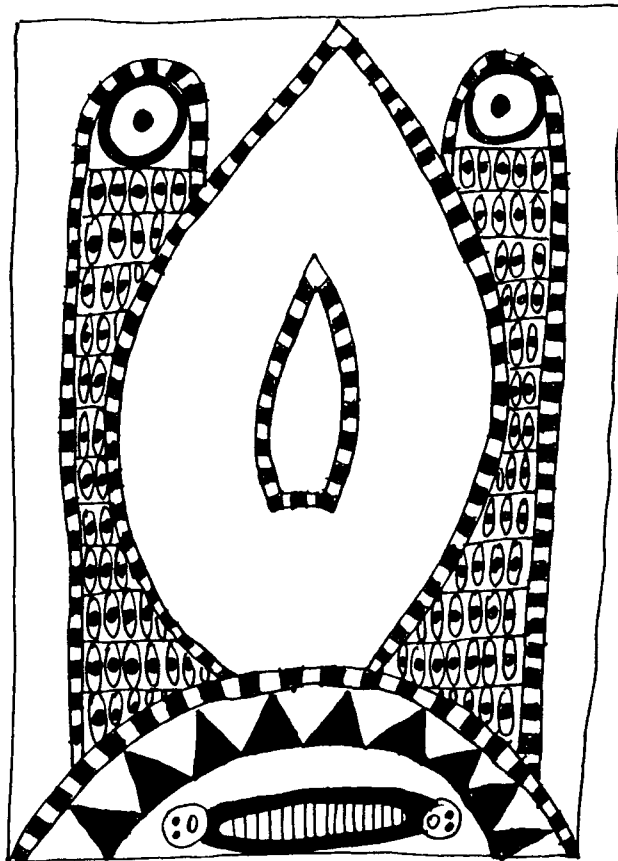
ED PINSENT

Roger Smith ***Extended Plays*** **EMANEM 4032 (1999)**

Roger Smith is an improvising acoustic guitarist, who's been compared to Derek Bailey (with whom he studied) and Hans Reichel, the German artist who rebuilt the guitar, several times, along his own radical lines in the 1970s. Actually, it doesn't take

much to make a comparison like that, because how many *other* improv guitarists can you name? (Just kidding...don't bother to send me a list, sports fans). This is an exceedingly pleasant CD - sometimes perhaps a bit too pleasant, but it is very intimate and warm, and full of light and space. I'll probably get in trouble for saying this, but it reminds me in places of Testcard music - if any of you are old enough to remember that - and seriously that isn't intended to be insulting or derogatory to Smith's music. I have passed many blameless hours in front of a TV screen with Testcard music playing.

Smith's playing is gentle and quiet - he's no John Fahey, that's for sure! These discursive, rambling and very extended solos take some time to unfold, but still work their way under your skin. All home recordings; the titles 'Summer Afternoon Sequence' and 'Early Summer Morning' refer to the time they were



put onto tape, and the ambience of this balmy atmosphere transfers to the disc. There are open windows, birdsong, traffic noise and coughing by the artiste - all of which producer Martin Davidson perceives as being intrusive, extraneous noises getting in the way of the music. Myself, I find they enhance the overall listening experience no end - making it intimate and real. Essential listening for those wispy and ethereal moods, and I know you've all experienced the like.

ED PINSENT

Spontaneous Music **Ensemble**

Low Profile

EMANEM 4031 (1999)

Three good long tracks, one short one, all recorded in London in 1977, 1984 and 1988. John Stevens - the eulogies for this UK original continue to pour in. More than just a drummer, he wielded a Guru-like benign influence over whatever teams of great players joined him to form The Spontaneous Music Ensemble. 'The Only Geezer an American Soldier shot was Anton Webern' is 31 minutes of exquisitely bleak whining and scraping plaintively whimpered by a mini-string section of Nigel Coombes' violin and Colin Wood's cello. Stevens' cornet, and his own intoning voice, have rarely sounded so good to me. This *is* uplifting music, finally, despite the slightly mournful pallor, because

it's a wail of compassion in the face of the pointless miseries all humans are faced with in the sad and weary pilgrimage through life. If you need a good arm around the shoulder, listen here, and wait'll you hear Stevens' moaning voice over the nervous string plucks and the paranoid guitar scabbings of Roger Smith...*Bonjour La Tension!*

In fact the knitting-a-20-foot scarf style of Roger Smith's playing makes a deal more sense when propelled by the gentle but very intricate fast pitter-patter of Stevens' drumming. All-acoustic performances, all very much of a piece, and plenty of room to breathe within the generous parameters of the long CD format. Can't really fault this CD then, unless you're a listener who prefers the more extrovert upfront SME playing of, say, a Trevor Watts or Evan Parker, but *Low Profile* by name and by nature is a comforting noise for introverts, maladjusts and those who live by the full moon. Actually the CD is less dramatic than that but if there was a full moon every single night it wouldn't be romantic, would it?

ED PINSENT

Abe / Yoshizawa / **Kondo / Bailey**

Aida's Call

USA, STARLIGHT FURNITURE
COMPANY *9 (1998)

Aquirax Aida is the man

immortalised in a Bailey solo guitar LP called *Aida*; he was a Japanese promoter of singular vision who arranged unique concerts of improv in his home country in April-May 1978. Bailey was one such beneficiary of this strategy and it's fair to say he remembers the man with warmth and affection. Part of this tour also included the musicians Mototeru Takagi the tenor player, and Toshiyuki Tsuchitori the percussionist, neither of which is on this recording - but it does feature the sax player Kaoru Abe (now dead) whose work has been documented by labels like PSF,

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Tokuma and Kojima; and Motoharu Yoshiwaza, the superlative bass player who is also no longer with this world. Bailey played with them all of them in Japan and, with Aida's help, made a record called *Duo and Trio Improvisations* originally issued on the Kitty Label (very rare on vinyl), reissued by DIW on CD. At that time he also made a solo guitar double LP called *Old Sights, New Sounds* on the Morgue label.

This *Aida's Call* CD is therefore a welcome and essential document of this period. It might be a slightly grubby audience recording, but this matters not a jot - the work still shines, and the intimacy of the venue comes over also. The long track 'Administratio' is the best one for me, immediately kicking into high gear to show how the international language of improvisation works. Bailey only had about two words of Japanese at his command for the whole tour; conversationally he may have been a bit lacking, but musically he's holding forth like a visiting academic at a linguistics consortium. Half of this 23 minute track is very slow and sonorous playing by all musicians. There is a lumbering majesty to the piece, brought about by the assurance and depth of the players' mastery. True spontaneous communication, resulting in some glorious long howls of musical agony and lamentations. It builds up in tempo creating a fine madness of cat-calling and interchange of ideas, yet never once does the recording fail us - and all players remain distinct and audible throughout. Of particular note is Moto's bass playing - he's working overtime to hold everything together. Not that anyone needs propping up or support, since Kaoru's inventive sax work keeps forging ahead into unexplored territory all the time. When Bailey warms up he moves from electronic moaning into vigorous atonal strumming and plucking moves, while the trumpet of Toshinori adds melodic and melancholic touches throughout. Recorded at Michada-Kavalinka on 3 May 1978, now finally issued by a Revolver subsidiary label in San Francisco. Excellent.

ED PINSENT

Rake

***Resume the Cosmos* AUSTRALIA, CAMERA OBSCURA RECORDS CAM 016CD (1998)**

This interesting collection, featuring five long tracks by a mysterious combo from Virginia USA, might be helpful to non-initiates or other civilians who have tended to give the world of improvised music a wide berth. Though no data is promulgated about Rake, my guess is they're youngish fellows with the usual healthy appetite for collecting weird records who have now decided to try their hand at emulating the sound of some of their favourite vinyl treasures in the home recording studio. So, although they probably have no jazz experience to feed into their

improv (like Evan Parker and many others associated with the UK scene do), they have an innocent feel for free playing. Their playing limitations become evident fairly early on unfortunately, because they usually play at one tempo - very slowly - and tend to get stuck when seduced by the textures of their own languid drones. But in their favour they deploy an interesting mix of instruments, combining the modern (moogs) with the ethnic (African shells, Djembe) with all forms of percussion (especially wind chimes, scrap metal, and that old favourite, the bowed cymbal), to offset their hooting and wailing clarinets and saxophones. These mournful blurts are often enhanced by studio effects, a light touch of echo here and there, but never swamped; Rake favour making rich sounds first, exploring the possibilities of ensemble playing

happened, unedited, on this 'fat-free' 3-inch CD.

ED PINSENT

Available for £5.50 incl p & p from Tony Bevan 2 Yew Tree Cottage, Manor Road, Rowsham, Aylesbury, Bucks HP 22 4QS.

Evan Parker with Paul Lytton, Paul Rutherford and Hans Schneider

Waterloo 1985

EMANEM 4030 (1999)

A single hour-long piece, 'Dark Interior'. Played by an all-star quartet, Evan Parker with his friends Rutherford and Lytton joined by

Schneider on the double bass. Recorded live at a European Jazz festival in 1985. More of a jazzy outing than a free improv one, but Parker's distinctive attack on the tenor sax is always recognisable in whatever idiom he chooses. Rutherford blows the trombone with a distinctly 'English accent', according to the sleeve notes. Lytton plays a smaller scale of his elaborate drumkit set-up, and contributes live electronics.

ED PINSENT

John Butcher, Phil Durrant, John Russell

The Scenic Route

EMANEM 4029 (1999)

A showcase CD, as good as modern UK improv can be, in a razor-sharp recording of these three players, from a live setting, playing all-acoustic. The rewards of listening are to be found as usual in the interaction between the players, noteworthy on the spacey

friendliness of the first four tracks (recorded at a French music festival) and on the long track 'Climate Change' recorded in London. Here, Davidson (who was there to witness and make the recording) reports how 'the atmosphere was highly strung' in the Red Rose that night, but the three musicians responded to the tension with calm underplaying, rather than opting for the hysterical opposite.

Underplaying this may be, but they each make their instruments work overtime, subtly developing the range of noises you can wring from the constructions of wood and metal despite their possible limitations; Butcher has to take the prize this time, with sucking noises and sneezes that sound like he's suckling the last known species of a rare bird. Durrant runs a close second, showing two of his violin bowing technique specialities, the piece of rubbery flesh stretched until breaking point effect, and the one-man phase pedal effect - fast motion wavering in the air does it, playing pure vibrations. Both of these strategies carry on what I perceive (probably wrongly) to be one of the agendas among some (not all) UK improv players, the attempt to undermine the overfamiliar sound of a musical instrument. Through transcending this, one transcends the expected, gets around the banal. OK, it may be argued that if

Rake.



Resume the Cosmos

second. Even without the pseudo cosmic hoo-hah of the sleeve notes (very like The Mahavishnu Orchestra in the 1970s) there's a dose of sufficiently opaque mystery and atmosphere here to retain interest.

ED PINSENT

Tony Bevan

Three Oranges

**FOGHORN RECORDS FOGCD001
(1998)**

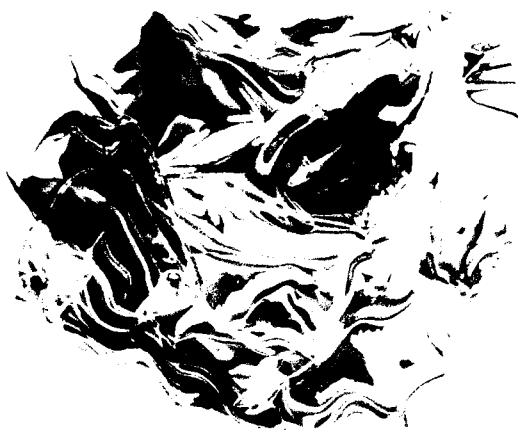
A solo set from the reliably enthusiastic Bevan pumping his huge bass saxophone. After starting off with a semblance of a bouncy jazz tune, Bevan gets down to business with some serious long blowing tones which are full of overtones and sound like a giant ogre stretching himself before eating you alive for breakfast. Towards the end he livens up so much you can hear every breath, every click on the keys, impassioned scat-singing into the mouthpiece, a man throwing himself into his work and making as much racket with his honks and growls as any heavy metal guitarist. You'll be twitching along in time to this groovy improv skronk. Actually the name of his record label should tell you a lot also. Short and sweet. Recorded live at a London venue in July 1998 and presented as it

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you listen to enough improv some of the sounds start to acquire a clichédness of their own - but at any rate the players are dealing in their own currency, a unique coin minted in this country some thirty years ago, right? If you can only be bothered to hear one track, make it 'Belayed' - a sublime example of bittersweet melancholy, and considerable empathy between the musicians to share the sorrowful burden. If you want hostile or angry music, look elsewhere.

ED PINSENT

VERYAN WESTON JOHN EDWARDS MARK SANDERS



MERCURY CONCERT

EMANEM 4028

Graham Halliwell and Simon H Fell

9 Points in Ascent

BRUCE'S FINGERS BF 24 (1998)

Inexplicably missed this one out from our big Simon H Fell retrospective last issue. It's a spirited and punchy studio set of acoustic duo improvisations. Halliwell on the alto sax, Fell on the double bass. natch...blasting out the sort of committed and fiery playing that gives you renewed hope in British jazz. Both players give an excellent account of themselves - GH's fluid sax leaping up into new realms of freedom, pausing for some understated sucking-squeaks, and generally chattering like a demented gibbon as it cavorts around the room. SHF's bass not only props up, it glides, supports, groans, plucks...vast range of exciting effects pour forth from the instrument...all adding to the two-way crosstalk in these conversations that shows the constant sparking off of ideas between these two...a real musical dialogue...can only result from years of friendship and compassion, but also training and discipline in playing and mastering your instrument. And it inspires the listener too, not just to join in the music but to go and exercise some free-thinking strategies of one's own. Beautifully recorded by Halliwell and edited by Phil Darke, a key technician in the realisation of Fell's last double CD masterpiece. If you haven't bought a copy of that yet, then keep looking.

ED PINSENT

Rottor (Paul Rutherford, Julie Tippett, Keith Tippett, Paul Rogers)

The First Full Turn

EMANEM 4026 (1998)

I love Keith Tippett - he's a grand master of the jazz improvised piano - alive with invention and energy, he's this country's Cecil Taylor, as Edwin Pouncey has rightly claimed. I'd do everything in my power to see a solo gig by this man, because the times I've seen him play are lodged in my memory as not

only great musical events (which they were), but as warm encounters with humanity and compassion, delivered by a man who speaks with quicksilver fingers of love! These memories I treasure - as much as the shopping list of LPs I'm about to rattle off to you. Only to add that Tippett signs off most of his CDs now with the legend 'May music never just become another way of making money', a sentiment I trust we all endeavour to live by. At any rate my suggestion is you grab any of these with Tippett's name attached: Solo piano - *Mujician*, SAJ 37. Duos - *No Gossip* with Louis Moholo, SAJ 28; *TNT* with Stan Tracey, SJ 104. Large group ensembles, 2 of which were released (amazingly) on progressive rock labels and garnered a nod of attention from *Melody Maker* in the 1970s: *Dedicated To You*, *But You Weren't Listening* VERTIGO 6360024;

Keith Tippett's Ark, *Frames* OGUN OGD 003-004; Centipede, *September Energy* RCA DPS 2054. *Ovary Lodge* with Harry Miller, Frank Perry and Julie Tippett OGUN OG 600. With Hugh Hopper, Elton Dean and the synth player/drummer Joe Gallivan: *Cruel But Fair* (FIDADRO 4) and *Mercy Dash* (CP 2001).

I don't know how well Keith Tippett is represented here, where he plays some muted piano on a very low-key set recorded at Le Mans in 1998. But he's not the star; it's an ensemble set. The players are all highly respected and long-serving members of the UK jazz and improv scene. Julie scat-sings, Paul Rutherford plays the trombone, and Paul Rogers plucks and bows his double bass. They have played together previously in many various combinations, eg Julie and Keith have performed as Mujician for over thirty years, and they made the *Couple in Spirit* LP for Editions EG in 1988. Rutherford and Rogers recorded a duo concert issued as *Rogues* in 1988. Rutherford brought in Keith T and toured in 1996 as ROTOR, but when Julie joined the troupe they adapted the name to ROTTOR. The bonus track is 12 and half minutes of Paul Rutherford, playing a trombone solo piece, and recorded in a London Church.

ED PINSENT

Veryan Weston, John Edwards, Mark Sanders

Mercury Concert

EMANEM 4028 (1999)

Excellent, high-quality recording of a fine, straightahead bit of jazzy improvising from this English trio. The sleeve notes say this as good as the Bill Evans trio, and that Veryan Weston is also influenced by the piano works of Stockhausen and Boulez. Whatever, his playing is very precise and he's ably supported by the bass and drums supplying energetic scrapes and thumps. Throughout, strong evidence of group interaction and careful listening to each other, without any fudging or falling back on clichés that I can hear - and the crystal clear recording doesn't miss a thing. Three tracks, one of which is virtually the length of an LP!

ED PINSENT

Derek Bailey

Fairly Early with Postscripts

EMANEM 4027 (1999)

Very fine, highly recommended as ever - almost a retrospective survey of the works of the founding father of the improvising guitar in this country. With fourteen tracks it's actually very good value for money, which isn't something you hear said about improv records very often; it reissues an out-of-print Emanem LP with bonus tracks culled from other sources, plus further unreleased cuts. A whistlestop tour through Bailey's magisterial pluckings from 1971 up to 1998 inclusive, which means we hear early pedal-assisted solos right through to a snapshot of his notorious drum 'n' bass exploits in 1998. Musically, the 'Six Fairly Early Pieces' which kick off the CD with a bold 12 minute segue

fairly early DEREK BAILEY with postscripts



EMANEM

4027

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of works, are my faves - being as how the volume pedal wins me over any time, but it's the sheer lucidity of his craft which shines here, and the non-stop production of ideas. It's been said of Robert Johnson the blues guitarist that some listeners can't believe it's one person playing everything on one guitar in one take; the same applies here, emphatically. Bailey sounds like at least four guitarists playing at once, that many styles, that many sounds, that much invention. The more you listen the more unbelievable it becomes.

Two rehearsal extracts from the 1974 concert with Anthony Braxton remind us of how great are the issued recordings of this; and they are documents of a significant moment in time. Here you had the meeting of two players who had grown through post-war jazz music, but in different countries and with different traditions, and had evolved into quite distinct entities. In this particular joining together, whatever debt was owed by UK improv to US free jazz is paid in full; while Afro-American Braxton forged another important link in his chain of reconciliation with European musical strands. That's my stupid theory, anyhow...what I like on 'Area 8' here is the way Bailey's bad-tempered string-scraping is exactly the noise of the sort of clapped-out motor car he would own (if he drives) failing to start on a cold morning.

Couple of great jams with John Stevens the fantastic drummer and Kent Carter on bass. These are from 1973, and Bailey's oddly joyless whoops of joy can be heard, indicating what a great time was had by all. And there's the hilarious throwaway joke 'In Whose Tradition?', which mercilessly rips the piss out of virtually any label that has ever been thrown at Bailey's unique music in just over 30 seconds. An impolite raspberry to the critics, albeit an intellectual one...good idea.

We learn a bit also about this business of conversational speaking while playing, a routine often employed by Bailey on recordings to humourous effect, either intentional or not - he sounds so world-weary and wry as befits this shrewd Yorkshireman. On 'Tunnel Hearing' the habit of yattering is almost explained as something the musician does to occupy the other half of his brain while he's engaged in the act of improvisation...we're advised to pay no attention to the content of his wittering. Other tracks, piecing together the stages in an ongoing taped correspondence between Bailey and fellow Socialist Martin Davidson, are selected here to chart the misery of the Thatcher government years. 'We must be a nation of bleedin' masochists', he laments, at the 1987 re-election. 'She's doing it again! No way out, no way out...' As you know, Bailey was working nights as an

apprentice plumber at this time, and feared the new tax budget would not foster an environment conducive to the small businessman. He should only have known how things would turn out. For further details on this little-known chapter of the musician's life, wait until the new biography appears in print. 'As we used to say,' Bailey remarks in his 1998 post-postscript, 'There's nothing to play, and we're playing it.' He's talking about his music, but hey - it might just as well be the motto of New Labour too.

ED PINSENT

CONCEPTS OF DOING

Alexander Frangenheim has started his own label in Germany and issued four CDs of European improvisation to date. He's based in Stuttgart where since 1988 he's been the organiser of many interesting and important concerts of improv and contemporary music, and multi-media happenings involving dance, film, video, poetry and painting. The Concepts Of Doing festival started in 1992 and he managed to persuade not a few international big names from the many strains of improv in England, America and mainland Europe. Since he decided to start taping some of the stuff he's come up with these four releases which are not only good CDs, but also promote the man Frangenheim and his activities - because let's face it, it's always tough going promoting this

improv form and scene. *Here Now*, COD 003, features Evan Parker and Gunther Christmann, in a combination of solo and duo works recorded live in 1998. It's a fantastic recording, over 70 minutes of premium quality improv music, and taped with awesome sonic clarity. Leading off with the monumental 32 minute soprano sax solo 'Cone of The Future', which documents Evan Parker doing what (in my opinion) he does best, delivering a continuous circular-breathing intonso-marathon warbling baroque blast of complicated-repetitive free playing. No-one else in the world can do this and it's the sound of a unique identity, unmistakable, immediately recognisable. Free Jazz it is not, but Evan had his life turned around from seeing Cecil Taylor play in 1962, and a solo like this is a distillation of that emotional thrill which still fuels him to this day, at the same time a reinvention of Cecil Taylor's unique music without any discernible traces of an American idiom within it. Mastery and control are ideas which spring to mind when you hear Evan truly on form like this - the piece could sail virtually anywhere, like a huge schooner guided across the ocean by a veteran mariner. Not a single mistake or fluff in the very precise breathing and fingering in the entire long piece - and the recording wouldn't let a single error slip by unnoticed. And there's more -

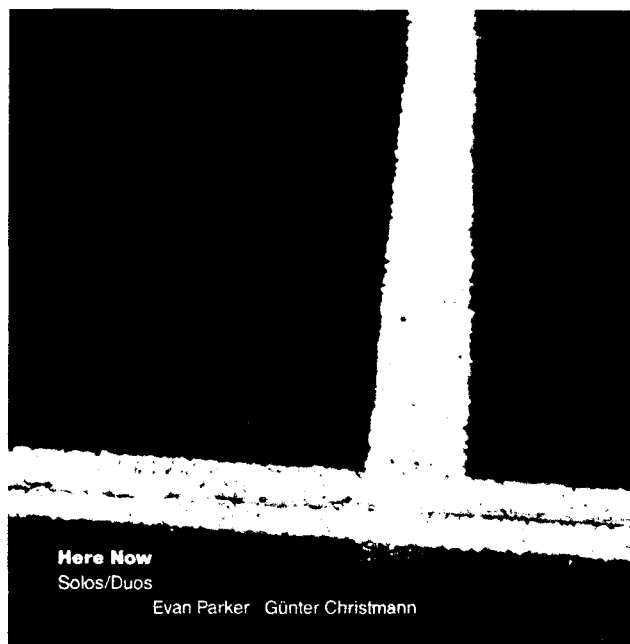
some excellent interplay duo pieces with Euro veteran Gunther Christmann (played with the Globe Unity Orchestra in the 1970s) on the cello and trombone. Parker may have found one of his perfect foils in this musician, sensitive and supportive at all times - and yet they never played together before this recording. There's that very delicate, fast-moving and instant response that improv demands - creating the tiny detailed structures of music and sound that vanish as soon as they appear. *Here Now* is destined to become a 'classic' in the field one suspects.

ED PINSENT

*Alexander Frangenheim,
Concepts Of Doing, Im
Schellenkonig 56d, 70184*

Stuttgart, Germany.

email frangenheim@ala.de



music, finding the money, time, energy, venues, and once again the money!

Some of these releases are pretty essential, a real shot in the arm for the

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Antitrade

An Ash International Compilation
Ash International [R.I.P.] # Ash 4.1CD

memory

- 1-3. hhh WOULD YOU
- 4. Leif Elggren MOTHER!?
- 5-8. hhh HAVE KNOWN ME
- 9. Hazard PEENEMUNDE

space

- 10. WHITE
- 11. S.E.T.I AURORA
- 12. I Don't Know
- 13. Disinformation 9v DC Supply with Homemade Copper Solenoid (Unidentified VLF Radio Noise)

inner

- 14. AER Recorded at the Inner Garden, the Meiji Shrine, Shibuya-Ku, Tokyo, October 1990
- 15-17. hhh IN THE STREET?
- 18. In a Constant State of Rebellion
- 19. Bruce Gilbert THE BOOK* [with thanks to Daniel Menche]
- 20. A Happy Belgrade Recorded on Guy Fawkes night at Primrose Hill, London, November 1987

"The sharp-looking packaging [with, as always, intriguing photography and crisp typesetting] works extremely well with the music it's designed to wrap. Ash releases excell in this aspect and I think it's a point that deserves wider attention... The sound itself is curious: dense with information it has at the same time a simple, almost organic feel to it. Maybe it's my organism that is humming along? Anyway, this CD is more than a sum of its parts - it's like a music installation where one is exposed to different facets / dimensions of a given piece." [Sonic Cairo]

Dĩ-n

Fennesz_Harding_Rehberg

Live at The Gallery Keller, The Hague, The Netherlands

One-sided vinyl only. 20:59 Ash # 4.8.
Pressed on 180 gram heavyweight vinyl and designed by minitron

This is a one-sided, limited edition vinyl, recorded live by Fennesz_Harding_Rehberg appearing for the first time together. A bemused - and very cold - audience witnessed the Austrian pair put to the sword various samples from the Ash catalogue. It was processors a-go-go; Rehberg's laptop working overtime and Fennesz's box of tricks generating the only heat in the concrete box.

Christian Fennesz is a recording artist with releases on Mego (Mego 016) and shortly Touch, to be released in October 1999
MSCHarding is the proprietor of the label, Ash International [R.I.P.]
Peter Rehberg is one of the founders of Mego, and one half of Rehberg & Bauer, recording artists for Touch (TO:32 and TO:39)

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"A Beauty in the Possible Madness"

SONIC BOOM talks about the new PESTREPELLER record, electronic equipment, the Radiophonic Workshop and the EMS Studio

SONIC BOOM HAS PROGRESSED LIGHT YEARS beyond the extended druggie psychedelic jams he used to play in his band Spacemen 3. Now a collector and student of vintage electronic equipment (and highly confident when it comes to operating these devices in a live environment, so say those who have played alongside him), he showcases this interest in a project called E.A.R. (Experimental Audio Research). Sonic is also occasionally associated with releases and compilations by new psychedelic bands. Through Ochre Records, he released in June 1999 his reworking of an obscure noise record by the English power-noise trio Ultrasonic Attack Wave Pestrepeller - aka Pestrepeller for short. Pestrepeller are Ed Pinsent, Harley Richardson and Savage Pencil - the last being a friend of Sonic Boom and (he admits) the only one in the band he's heard of!



EP How and when did you hear the Pestrepeller CD *Rodent and Insect Eliminator*? What attracted you to it? What things could you hear in it?

SB I first heard the *Rodent and Insect Eliminator* CD on its release. It was given to me by Long Gone John at Sympathy [For The Record Industry] who knew I was friends with and a fan of Edwin (Savage Pencil)'s work. It sounded to me like a bunch of people getting off on noise and sound and texture with lots of guitar feedback action. And most interestingly (to me) it sounded like 'non-muso' anti-musicians not letting any theory get in the way of a bit of sound-skaping. It sounded like people were really free-forming. It was just this raw noise and no-one was trying to throw a solo in and do anything at all musical. It was just sound for sound's sake. I was just looking for something that was very rich and dense in sound to sculpt into something else.

EP How is it possible to 'remix' a record like that? Firstly it's a dense wall of noise and feedback throughout, with very little space for interpolations. Secondly, it was recorded using one mic (therefore a mono source). Did these things present significant obstacles?

SB Obviously, this new piece is not strictly a remix. I wouldn't call it that. It is a new piece using the rich and varied tonal source of the original CD. But processed and overlaid into a new cacophony of sound, by using automatic electronic systems to control volume, timbre and pitch. One of the biggest problems was there was quite a lot of noise on the original tape. I was using the CD and overdubbing it several times, going through different processing, and getting quite a build-up of hiss.

EP The finished product has your fingerprints all over it - very hard to trace any of the original source material. Was this what you intended?

SB Yes and no. The whole thing was, as usual with E.A.R., an experiment. There was no definite end product perceived, but I wanted to experiment with long ramps of sound, each building to a crescendo and then immediately finishing. It was mainly processing it with filters so that it was slowly revealing more and more of the original. Much of my work has

involved crescendo as a musical metaphor for more tangible human moods, feelings and emotions. The piece consists mainly of volume crescendos, tonal crescendos and pitch crescendos, some more subtle modulations, cross-modulations and interpolations of control signals.

My biggest obstacle was the inherent hiss in the source material and the noise generated by overdubbing multiple takes on 30 year-old equipment. I managed to contain it to a degree where I think it contributes to the overall ambience of the piece in an unobtrusive way.

I've been doing it as live shows in Bristol and then in London. It works really nicely backwards! I put the tape in backwards by mistake at the soundcheck and it sounded so good I did it at the gig.

EP In principle, do you think remixing is a good idea?

SB No, not particularly, but in some cases yes. A lot of remixes I hear sound like they (the remixers) could care less for the original song and only seek to remould it, however unrecognisably, into their own song/piece. My intention was *always* to create a new piece, merely using existing source material as a sound source, varied and randomised, to construct the piece in hand. I would have equally liked to properly remix the Pestrepeller source CD, but as you point out this was (a) impossible technically, and (b) would be pointless in terms of the original piece's intent and delivery.

EP What's your idea of a successful remix?

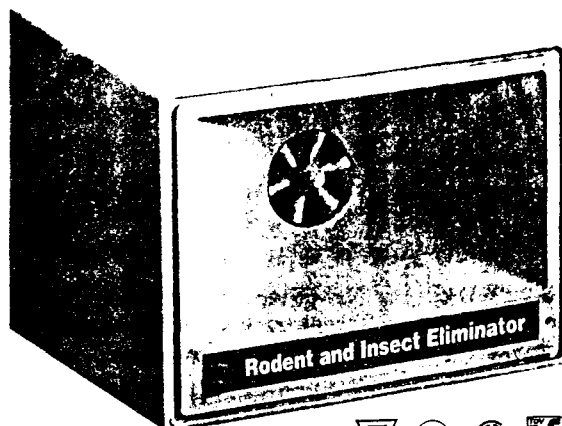
SB A successful remix, to me, shows some fingerprint of the remixer, but primarily must stand with the rest of the artist's oeuvre without too much discord. A remixer should, I think, offer a fresh set of mixing ears, a perhaps different perspective, but above all respect the work they seek to remix. For example, Nurse With Wound's Stereolab remixes.

Just to reiterate, remixing was definitely not my intention with this piece.

EP If your sleeve art is anything to go by, you're terribly pleased with your VCS3 synth. What is so attractive about this particular model? What can it do that other synths can't?

SB Yes, the VCS3, and its portable non-identical twin the Synthi A, which are both electronically identical if not visually, presents a useful study in limited resources. The instrument

ULTRASONIC ATTACK WAVE PESTREPELLER



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is a modular synthesiser and sound processor allowing many different possible treatments and control systems. More information is available from the company that has manufactured them, since 1969 to the present day: ems@www.ems-synthi-demon.co.uk/emsstory.html

But in brief, the instrument features three oscillators (audio or control), a ring modulator, a voltage controlled filter, three voltage controlled amplifiers, voltage controlled spring reverb and a noise generator. These separate modules, along with signal inputs and outputs, remain unconnected until pins are placed in a patch bay to connect the modules for the particular use in hand. In this way, as with most modulars, there is no pre-defined usage and all the sound manipulating possibilities are freely controlled by the user.

The VCS3 / Synthi A, while being in some ways a limited resource, is beautifully designed to enable and invite many non-standard and unusual routings of signals and control voltages. There is a definite beauty in the possible madness contained in this unique instrument.

The complexities and eccentricities of this instrument are outside the scope of this short interview, but to give some idea of its range, it is possible with just three connections to make over 16 million different variable routings - mind-boggling, in view of the fact that it allows you to use up to 256 connections - giving infinite possibilities from fairly limited resources.

EP What other interesting electronic equipment do you have? Are you a collector of vintage equipment?

SB I'm very fortunate over the years to have been able to accumulate a nice collection of analogue sound generators and modifiers. (See list opposite). It is easily possible, with a little ingenuity, to make very cool FX boxes from various children's toys by simple addition of signal input and output jack sockets - easily added, and can often be internally customised to produce unique sounds. Likewise, many cheap keyboards, such as Casio SK1 sampling keyboards provide many high-quality usable sounds - I've been using one on records on and off since 1989 - for 'pocket-money' price.

EP Do you use these devices totally intuitively, or are you interested in methods like composition, using graphic scores?

SB I'm interested in probabilistic and heuristic composition methods, and of course a large dose of intuition and non-tuition! Graphic scores are an integral part of E.A.R.'s live performances, but only on a fairly simple, improvisational basis. I'm a big fan of the beautiful scores of people like Cornelius Cardew, but am more drawn to the openness and improvisational intention of it as a guide, not in a literal scored 'written in stone' type way.

I also am attracted to the idea of found scores, such as circuit boards, map perspectives, mountain range outlines and city skyline silhouettes, but rarely do I work in this way. I think my position is somehow to try and break the divide between modern classical (high brow) and more rock-based (low brow) music arenas. It seems at the moment that there is a growing openness of both high and low-brow areas to each other and any truly modern experimental based soundscapes or 'music' must address both arenas if seeking to be in any way 'utopian' or 'communal'.

The Radiophonic Workshop and EMS Studios

EP I believe you've done some research in the area of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Would you say this is currently a neglected area of the history of electronic music and musique concrète? Such recordings as were issued are now rare and expensive. Are you in a position to instigate a reissue programme? Do you know if any of the creators still alive, or active in making music?

SB The story of electronic music and music concrète in this country is woefully underexposed.

The VCS3 was designed primarily by a bunch of inventors and composers, the main guy of whom, who owned the company, was called Peter Zinovieff. The ground-breaking work done by people like Peter Zinovieff, the man originally behind E.M.S., is still yet to be properly revealed in all its glory. Actually, Space Age Recordings, the label I work with most, is issuing a series of recordings made at Zinovieff's incredible music and sound laboratory - Musys.

Zinovieff, an eccentric genius inventor and composer, of royal Russian descent, was the man responsible for such inventions as the first portable synth, the first digital music sequencer, the first guitar multi-FX pedal, as well as some of the most interesting and early sequencers, vocoders, video synthesisers. He had this incredible computer which I think he bought in 1966, and this incredible analogue / digital computer studio, where he did very advanced sound generating and manipulating techniques. His studio was unique for being the only private studio

A NICE COLLECTION...

* EMS VCS3

◇ Two x EMS Synthi As, with 49 x 49 super matrix)

* 3 panels of Serge Synthesiser and modifying equipment

◇ O.S.C. Oscar

* Moog Opus 3

◇ EMS Polysynthi

* Yamaha TX 812 Module

◇ Largeish collection of guitar FX pedals

* Various sound generating Children's toys, usually modified and customised

Car boot sale finds

* 1960s Hammond organ, with bass, drums and reverb (given free!)

◇ Roland MC202 Synthesiser and sequencer, £17.00 (worth about £300)

* Korg Latin Percussion drum machine, £6.00 (worth over £100)

◇ Casio sampling keyboards - from £2 - £10

* Older Casio and Yamaha keyboards - from 50p to £15

in the world to have all this equipment. All the rest of them were funded by Bell Labs or by some big University. The way he operated his studio was as an experimental studio, which he would make available to people that he felt would use it in an interesting way. A couple of years back, he gave me all the tapes for all of this stuff. There's Harrison Birtwistle, Hans Werner Henze, a lot of his own music, people like Jonathan Harris, a whole load of people who have now become part of the respected modern classical scene, who in their day were, I suppose, much more students of it.

EP: These are unreleased tapes?

SB: Well, *Chronometer* by Harrison Birtwistle was released - but it was deleted very quickly, and it's a really amazing recording. There was Peter Zinovieff's *January Tensions*, which was also released as a very limited record run. So a couple of them were released for a very short period of time. So this is coming out - it's been a real labour of love in that it was quite a complex scenario. The guy who ran the studio was quite a mercurial character, and he had no interest in making money, he was just a mad inventor kind of guy! In fact, they were the first people to bring out things like a digital music sequencer, and a portable analogue synth. Everyone thinks Americans invented everything from the computer on, which of course they didn't. It seems, through my research, that this guy also did a lot of things which have been for

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years credited solely to Robert Moog or Donald Buchla, things that he was actually doing in parallel. He was working on analogue synthesisers from 1962, which was quite early on.

The Radiophonic Workshop question is more complex. Funnily enough, I have tried to license stuff from the BBC. A friend of mine who lives in Scotland, [Drew Mulholland] who is Mount Vernon Arts Lab, put out a CD called *The Tomb Of The Cybermen* which was the Cybermen music, I think from about 1964 or 1965. I don't know how he went wrong with that. He had it in his head that he could sell 10,000 of these things, because of the Dr Who connection. Then he brought it out, and the cover...although it had pictures of Cybermen on it, it didn't actually say Dr Who anywhere on it. Which I think was a big [mistake]...it was certainly his main market. It just said *The Tomb of The Cybermen*, and even that was written on the back card. It was very obscure. I don't think it sold anything like he expected it to.

EP Has the BBC been co-operative?

SB Well, no, unfortunately. The story of it is, I tracked down Delia Derbyshire. And she happens to live very close to me, she lives about 19 miles away. I've been working with her lately. She dropped out. She did this thing called *White Noise*, the first *White Noise* LP in the late 1960s¹, and I think in about 1970-1971 she left the BBC in disgust at the way they were treating people there. And she stopped making music, which is sad. You probably know she was the Dr Who theme woman. She realised the original and best-known Dr Who theme with tape loops and manipulation.

She's back on track now, and doing stuff. Unfortunately, the BBC when asked about stuff...the woman in charge of licensing didn't know who the Radiophonic Workshop was! And then they didn't know about the composers...well, they didn't like to call them composers, people like Delia Derbyshire and Malcolm Clarke. They didn't have any clue about these people, and it was a bit of a nightmare being there. I know when Drew licensed, on his Mount Vernon Arts Lab CD, it's got the original *Dr Who* theme, and they charged him £115 for the license of what

must be one of their most famous pieces of music ever. Which seems a big mistake! Then he went back to them and said, 'Well OK, I'd like to license these tracks - this one's 20 seconds, this one's 30 seconds, this one's 15 seconds', and they wanted about £400 [each] for these 15-20 second segments. Which is from one extreme to the other. The woman in charge of licensing said that she only ever dealt with John Peel sessions, and that was the only thing people ever wanted to license from the BBC. Hence it would have to be £400 a track.

But I've just found that Delia did these beautiful pieces in 1963 and 1964, where they took a whole load of vox-pop stuff, with lots of different people talking about their dreams. And common dreams, like falling, drowning, which seem to occur in people's dreams a lot. And she edited it all up into a collage - well it's not a collage, the voices don't overlap, but it's a sort of monophonic collage of people talking about their dreams. And then she's underlaid it with all this electronic stuff, and these are 45 minute pieces that were done for the BBC. So at the moment, as a first thing, I'm

¹ The *White Noise*, *An Electronic Storm*, ISLAND ILPS 9099 (1969). David Vorhaus was Production Co-Ordinator, with Electronic Sound Realisation by Delia Derbyshire and Brian Hodgson.

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trying to license those. It seems that, as it's only one piece, they won't be able to charge so much!

EP Well I really support you for doing this, I think that's excellent work. It takes somebody who's keen enough to do it - you have to be a real fan.

SB Delia is one of the unsung heroines of British electronics and was very instrumental in the cross-pollination going on in the UK and European scene - for example it was Delia who introduced both Stockhausen and Pink Floyd (amongst many others) to the wonders of E.M.S. equipment.

The other person I've been trying to do some releases of is Daphne Oram, another significant pioneer of electronic music. She was the woman who set up the Radiophonic Workshop but then went off to set up her own synthesising system, called Oramics. Her Oramics Machine was a uniquely British invention to control sound parameters in a kind of synthesis. You drew patterns and waveforms and what have you, on reels of film. And then as the waveform was pulled over a light-sensitive reader, it would read the waveforms and synthesise the sound. Quite a lot is known about her, she's been publicised and influenced a lot of people on the English electronic music scene, but none of her music's available. So I'm trying to do that as well. But she's on her deathbed at the moment, very ill after a stroke and seems to be close to her end. So it's not easy trying to work stuff out.

EP A shame - I think this is part of our heritage. It's like so many things at the BBC, the civil service mentality seems to prevail.

SB Oh yes, and it's all changed again since. It ran down and down over the years and they ran the Radiophonic Workshop down to nothing, then closed it. As you say - particularly the BBC and what they claim to be, they should instigate their own series of archive releases. But unfortunately they don't.

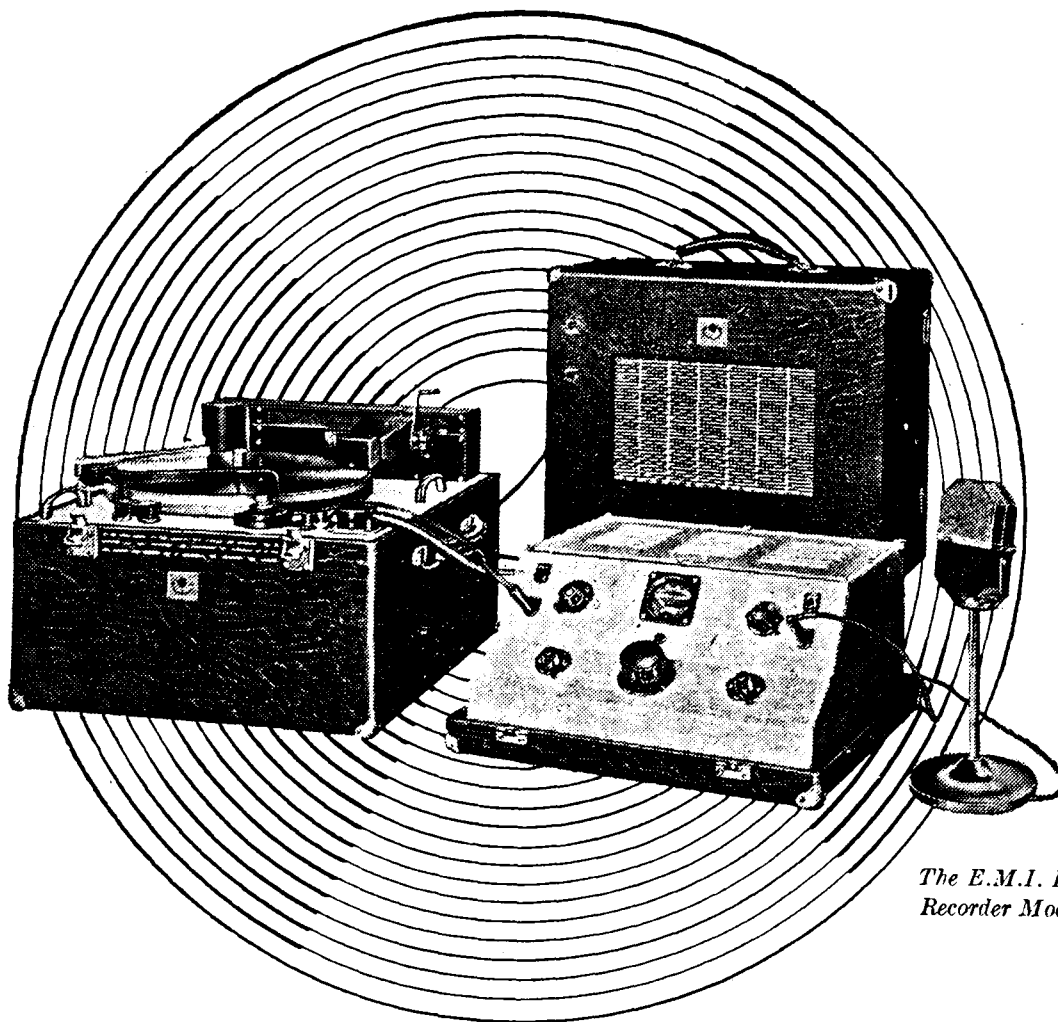
Delia is still in touch with a lot of the Radiophonic Workshop people, most of them are still alive. There's been a couple of people over the last few years who have supposedly been archiving all the stuff and finding out what they kept, and what they threw away. And they threw a lot of stuff away, apparently, in the early 1980s. Brian Hodgson, who was head of the

Workshop at the time, was given the job of deciding.

Like the EMS stuff, it would have been fairly easy to wham out a CD - there's loads of beautiful photos and stuff. So I feel that the whole history of it is woefully undertold and is very biased against what happened in this country. It's just not been documented well.

EP Are you thinking of doing a book?

SB Funnily enough, the guy who did *The A to Z of Analogue Synthesisers*², when he found out I was doing all this stuff, I got together with him to help him with his book and get all the EMS stuff right. When he realised how much info and how interesting the stories were behind the whole thing, he said 'Let's do a book'. My other problem is I'm not really a writer. I have done stuff for *Record Collector* and other people before that, [but] it's hard work for me. Primarily it's not what I do. I can do it but I have to think long and hard about it, and rehash it. So with the EMS thing, I should just put the music out, but I wanted to really make the booklets with them just full of information and pictures and scores and stuff. And that's been the slowing-down part of it really.



*The E.M.I. Portable
Recorder Model 2300*

² Peter Forrest. The book is available from Star House, Sandford, Crediton, Devon EX17 4LR.

IN THE ART GALLERY



[and] contemporary composers

Psychic Maps Creaky Acoustic Instruments
Doomy electric filth-bursts A Floating Question Mark
Effigy of Translucence Elaborately patterned chaos
The Ghosts of Penitent Souls

Brandon LaBelle

Maps of Tenderness

GERMANY, SELEKTION SHS 004 (1998)

A recent one by LaBelle, who is one half of id battery with Loren Chasse. Chasse has expounded in the current issue of *Halana* magazine on the theoretical dialectic behind their work. This release, besides inserting a bunch of confusing diagrams, includes some dense conceptual texts in the CD booklet printed on bible paper. One of LaBelle's inspirations was the French philosopher Guy Debord, who proposed that we all make 'Psychic Maps' of the cities we live in. The underpinning idea is, I think, that most people are alienated from modern life, and chiefly through living in cities - which are little more than huge soulless machines intent on sapping the very marrow from our lives. A bande dessinée by Jacques Carali pictured this very nicely, in the 1970s. A disenfranchised character in his tale *Abijiiiiime* sees a vision of urban life in a fantasy daydream. A sinister machine dominates the cityscape, parasitically feeding off the inhabitants through a network of tentacles. 'C'est bien ce que je pensais!' he snarls, 'Cette grande salope de machine nous pompe l'esprit!' ('Just as I thought! That fucking bitch of a machine is draining our spirit!')

So far, so good - nobody could dispute *that* as an accurate picture of modern life. So, to undermine and resist this dehumanising process, Debord proposed walking around the city on a 'dérive' - aimless imaginative drifting, not allowing oneself to be guided by any of the physical or sociological tramlines put in place by the establishment (roads, pavements, tunnels, bus routes, walkways, signs) or by any of our usual purposes (shopping, business, finance, work). By keeping an open mind, the rambling philosopher or artist would find the cracks in the fabric through which the true soul of the city could be found - and in time, reorganise reality to suit him/herself.

Enter Brandon LaBelle, with his Maps of Tenderness! Have a good listen to this CD and try and get past the enigmatic, almost perplexing surface - it may appear at first to be little more than an anonymous grinding. But surrender to the flow and you can begin to

discern the sub-atomic particles of these noises. You're seeing the very molecular structure of modern life, revealed in sound. And I'm most encouraged to find, from this title, that LaBelle's maps have a compassionate dimension; he's not here to wallow in the soullessness of the shopping mall or tower block, rather his project is to restore humanity to these zones.

In his unplanned, spontaneous rambles about the diseased alienated urban environments that might be found around Los Angeles, he discovers, I assume, some extremely unlikely sound events waiting to happen. If he's lucky, he's on hand in time to tape them with his recording devices. When I say unlikely, one thinks of the old Zen riddle of a tree falling in the forest and whether it makes a sound. That's a very pastoral image, so extend it and update it to refer to the urban possibilities we might be more familiar with; and think of all the undocumented possibilities transpiring around us all the time. And not simply the interesting ones like trains going by at night - that's positively romantic! I mean something dull, like a tin can in a garbage heap falling over, the spontaneous combustion of a wooden palette in a warehouse yard, a consignment of aluminium pipes shifting slightly in their packing cases at 2 am in a disused lot. Leonard Cohen sang this song, since taken to the bosoms of a million acoustic guitarists, about Suzanne who would 'show you where to look among the garbage and the flowers'. Showing us where to listen among the garbage (there are no flowers left) is pretty much what LaBelle is

about, I think. Even if you don't agree with the theory, you don't need it to enjoy these utterly bizarre and compelling sounds. It might as well be fragments from an alien planet soundtrack, but it isn't - it's the sound of the modern world.

For more explorations in this area, try and find the sixth LP in the Center of the Ass Run series, issued out of Massachusetts by Byron Coley on his Ecstatic Yod label. No titles on these LPs with their uniform sleeves and stickers, but this one is credited to id battery and bears catalogue number FYPL 35 #97, which translates as Father Yod LP 35, [released in] 1997.

ED PINSENT



Malcolm Goldstein

The Seasons: Vermont

USA, EXPERIMENTAL INTERMEDIA
FOUNDATION XI 120 (1998)

Enjoyed this one very much, thanks. A very organic recording, a very green recording, the ecology and sensitivity to the changing of the seasons is written all over it. Also a palpable sense of, erm, very good indigenous American craftsmanship, like perhaps a piece of Shaker furniture. Goldstein composed and recorded this piece in the early 1980s. It's a combination of composed materials (though the scores require the players to interpret and improvise quite freely) with a large amount of tape collage work. The tapework appears to have evolved first, out of Goldstein working with the sounds of nature much like Chris Watson and Luc Ferrari and others, but Goldstein took it specifically from the environs of his house in Vermont. The idyllic rural life was the inspiration - the very sounds drifting in through his window, or discovered on his walks in the countryside, becoming the fabric of the work. He devoted ten years to this project! The length of these creative processes means the work has fermented well, like good wine sealed in oak casks. You can gain further insights by reading his journal extracts reproduced in the booklet - how he was thinking of 'a new sound orchestration, a new harmony of pitch and non-pitch elements'. His graphic scores indicate the struggle he's had to realise this strange new vision - interestingly the score for 'Spring' resembles a river, while the one for 'Winter' looks like a map of open fields.

He clearly became attuned to the rhythms of nature and the specifics of his environment and this organic, ecological quality shines throughout the whole record. There's a tremendous

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amount of space and freedom in every piece. Along with the very eccentric and wonderful playing by the team of musicians, all played on creaky acoustic instruments, the very air and space and sunlight of his field recordings opens up the field of play to an unfathomable degree. Of course, the live musicians are interacting with the recordings in exciting and subtle ways. Just put it on and you'll create an instant atmosphere in your room; thus making real the record label's mission statement 'to extend the experience of these engaging and pioneering works beyond the performance space into the home.'



how representative this is of their other material. There are earlier CDs which apparently put nature and field recordings to the fore, but still include whispered poetry snippets. Guess they decided to stop whispering and start shouting...reach for your earplugs, folks.

ED PINSENT

Stephen Vitiello

The light of falling cars

featuring Pauline Oliveros,
Hahn Rowe, Rebecca Moore,
Paul Geluso

NETHERLANDS, JDK
PRODUCTIONS JDK 02 [1998]

A very creditable collection of short tracks by this young artist who is 'an emerging talent on the New York Scene', it says here...Nam June Paik, the video maker and big guy in the Fluxus Mafia, has taken Vitiello under his wing, and I think encouragement from John Zorn was also forthcoming. Here, he's extending his interest in creating film

soundtracks, and playing live music with his guitar and sampler, to producing an entire CD of very evocative electronic instrumental music. For the most part it's all very good - a bright sound, never murky, and the ensemble performances are aided considerably by the presence of the great Pauline Oliveros. She's an electronic composer veteran, transplanted from the West Coast, where she now lives inside a mountain and eats topazes for breakfast (not really). She meditates and plays music with her very spiritual Deep Listening Band, and continues to explore the possibilities of the amplified accordion. That's the instrument she plays here and it works a treat, particularly on the incandescent title track which, at times, bears a superficial resemblance to the recorded music of Harry Partch. Another fatuous observation for you...

Vitiello's best move is how he combines his tape samples with real-time playing: the choice of loops and samples is inspired, as they always add a (slightly grimy) patina of otherness to the whole performance, which tinctures the inflections of the other players, try as they may to ignore it. Hahn Rowe adds some very romantic melodic violin sweeps, while Rebecca Moore contributes Theremin, voice and violin. Paul Geluso plays bass. Vitiello's other wise move is to keep each track relatively short, rather than swooning into ecstasies by preserving every precious moment of bliss - it certainly left me wanting more, and it's good to end each piece perplexingly hanging in the air, like a floating question mark.

In all this record might be a bit tentative, a bit precious; and never does it run wild or startle the listener - but maybe it isn't intended to. There remains a good deal of high quality listening pleasure to be gained here. Good cover art too; a photograph of an art installation? Plaster casts of *memento mori* and graveyard angels and cherubim, with a superimposed eerie human face bearing its teeth.

ED PINSENT

The first track 'Summer' is my favourite, a very eventful one with I think sounds of workmen sawing, crickets, brooks babbling, a thunderstorm, tractors going by - very eventful, episodic, narrative and user-friendly. A kind of avant-garde version of *Song Cycle*, the 1967 Warner Brothers LP by Van Dyke Parks with its tremendous use of studio sound effects. The whole suite is good though, and the long track 'Winter' (summoning up visions of the long and hard Vermont winter) has very harrowing and dissonant violin textures. A good one from this American composer, previously unknown to me, but he's been a veteran of New Music and experimental dance theatre in his home country since the early 1960s, as composer, violinist and presenter. This record was originally issued, somewhat abbreviated, on the Folkways label in 1983; this CD offers the whole hour-long suite, plus a ten-minute bonus track 'Soundings for Solo Violin', a more recent cut from 1997.

ED PINSENT

XI Records, PO Box 1754, Canal Street
Station, New York, NY 10013, USA

Etant Donnes

Mort Aux Vaches

STAALPLAAT, NO NUMBER CD

Hideous beyond even the fevered imaginings of an Edgar Allen Poe, this CD yields a dreary spewing of portentous, vile French poetry, declaimed in utterly humourless echoed voices over blankets of doomy electric filth-bursts. About as much fun as drinking a glass full of muddy tapwater, and it leaves you with a ghastly sense of claustrophobia which you can only shake off by booking a three-month stay in the Sahara. I wonder if these guys have any sort of a following anywhere; perhaps some diehard Goth-mode axe-murder fans would enjoy it. The two French numbskulls responsible for this atrocity are Eric and Marc Hurtado, who have been releasing cassettes since the early 1980s, and have apparently made music with fellow masters of the self-important pompous outpouring, namely Michael Gira, Alan Vega, Lydia Lunch and good old Gabi Delgado from DAF. NB - not sure

Ragnar Grippe

Sand

GERMANY, STREAMLINE 1011

Soothing and strange. One from Christoph Heeman's fairly reliable label of modern instrumental musics. This one is not quite contemporary having first been issued as an LP in 1977 on the Shandar label...this French label, I need hardly remind you, was behind a whole string of excellent 20th century music releases, including fine works by Stockhausen, Terry Riley, Charlemagne Palestine, La Monte Young and Albert Ayler. This one is a solo record by Swede Grippe produced by 'consecutive overdubbing'. He recorded a series of mostly acoustic instruments and developed chain-of-thought ideas in sound, each piece slowly growing into a mesmerising and compelling effigy of translucence. The echo effect creates similar sensations to the best work of Terry Riley, while the overall technique reflects Grippe's background as a student of Luc Ferrari.

The work is inspired by the sand paintings of Viswanadhan, who I take to be a modern artist working in that medium; the cover probably shows him in action, smoothing over a huge red circle with his special mortar-board glove. Sand art is presumably ancient, still practised to a certain extent by Australian aborigines, Native American Navajos, and Tibetan monks; and you can hear Grippe's ambitions to forge a palpable link with their ancientness, through his music. Other parallels might be found: the simplicity of the actions in sand painting, and its presumably limited colour palette, are emulated by the simplicity of the music. As is the nature of the medium itself: you get the feeling this music, by its very aetheriality, is in danger of being swept away by the first sandstorm that whips up its wind of cruel indifference.

ED PINSENT

The Sound Projector 6ixth issue 1999

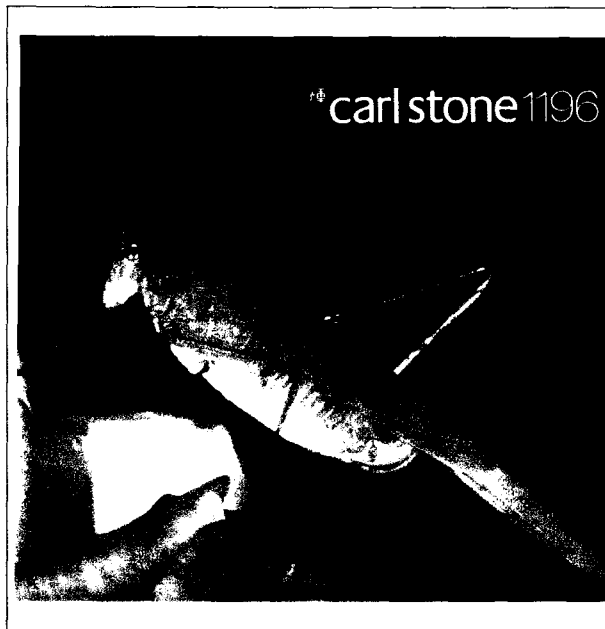
Carl Stone

Nyada

EMIT 1196

After my massive disappointment with *Mom's*, I found a copy of this CD by this American composer who works chiefly with old records and samplers, to generally pleasant effect. Actually this is the one I'd heard on the radio that got me interested in the first place. It's another dance related work, commissioned for a Japanese dancer, since extended to CD length. Actually it does manage, in places, to sustain a fairly eerie mood and smuggle in that elusive feel of exoticism - possibly through a treated ethnic drum sound, and bamboo flutes vying with electric pianos and muted trumpets. Carl Stone's one strength is his very subtle shading effects - listen attentively, especially in the early passages, for pastel nuances of light and tone, minute constantly-shifting changes in the background. Stone is capable of constructing a fairly credible sound world with fully realised backdrops; while in the foreground, sad to say, not a whole lot is going on, although he manages to keep looping a series of non-matched sounds and rhythms to generate some elaborately-patterned chaos. Some of his constantly-repeated sounds may grow a tad wearisome and annoying (they do for me at any rate), but it's because they seem cloying, sentimental, and appealing. This is I think only another sign of the composer's over-eagerness to please. There's a bit of a paradox in there somewhere.

ED PINSENT



Robert Graves 'The Philosopher' of which I quote a couple of relevant stanzas above. Of the extraordinary pieces on offer here, I call your attention to a few examples: 'Suono Interno' is an extract from a performance in a deserted church in Italy, infested by vermin. Fox strung two 150-foot long wires (NB - how can you get piano wires that long?) the full length of the church, attached to the door and presumably passing near the altar; from the astonishing sounds that resulted, projected out on the street outside, you might just catch the ghosts of penitent souls on their way to take Holy Communion giving voice to the Christian hope. On the other hand, you probably don't believe in God, so forget it.

Two longer pieces closing the CD result from a slightly less transient installation in the attic of the Kunsterhaus Bethanien in Berlin.

An attic space is no less resonant than a church to the human soul, well known as a repository of memories and sad souvenirs; Fox must have found it a therapeutic ritual, entering such a space to beat or bow out a series of explorations into his inner mental-mush, utilising these wires as a novel aid to psycho-therapy...he admits after all these actions were 'meant only for his private experience'. You've only to look at the photo of his enlightened face to gauge the success of these sessions. The full significance of this is probably kept quiet in the world of psychoanalysis, as it might put 100 followers of Sigmund Freud out of a day job.

It gets even more intense. 'Lunar Rambles' begins as metal bowls - iron and aluminium, bowed by the artist out on the streets of New York. Had Moondog happened to pass by, an unforgettable duet may well have resulted. 'Culvert' comes from another metal talisman, this one a rowboat model planted in the middle of a 100-foot long tunnel in the middle of a river in the USA. Fox gets his sounds by bashing the darn thing with a panoply of grotesque utensils, joined in that absurd pass-time by two other ninnyhammers he managed to persuade to join him one sunny afternoon for a live improvised session. What a striking image that rowboat presents; if there's a more apposite metaphor for the futility and loneliness of existence, I've yet to find one.

As you may have gathered, I like this music immensely. Terry Fox is an American performance artist and has a string of impressive credentials in the field of the visual arts, and his interest appears to lie primarily in weaving his sculptural webs in odd corners of the world, like some metallic spider. Whatever sound-documents may result from this activity have been issued in minuscule editions by artists' magazines or fine art editions, in 1970 and 1977, then fairly regularly from 1979 onwards. It would be nice to think he has no interest in music at all; his choice of sound sources is taken from his studies of John Tyndall, the 19th century scientist.

Apparently this esoteric pursuit has led him to use not only the wires, but also Bunsen burners, for his work. Another artist who has used wires is Alvin Lucier, but that's a pretty fatuous observation on my part. I'm just grateful for the chance to hear something so deeply moving, and in a way a testimony to some heroic struggle against the ways in which the modern world is ordered; a bit like Christo, only Terry Fox wraps the world with sounds, not with polythene. All praise to anyone who helped release this CD, a co-edition with a German art gallery to coincide with an installation exhibition.

ED PINSENT

Terry Fox

Ataraxia

GERMANY, EDITION S PRESS / PLATE LUNCH PL06 (1998)

What solace here for a laborious mind!

What a redoubtable and single task

One might attempt here:

Threading a logic between wall and wall,

Ceiling and floor, more accurate by far

Than the cob-spider's.

Breathtakingly, achingly beautiful music for the most part generated by wires, piano wires strung up inside unusual performance arenas and spaces and plucked by Terry Fox, a performance artist - the importance of whose work is only beginning to surface above the cognisance of a small elite. Fox's installations and art-actions are perplexing, remote, inaccessible. For any who doubt the importance of executing such apparently futile and marginal actions, I refer you to a poem by



UUUHH!!

THE ~~T~~WISTED GHETTO SUPERSTARS OF ALL!

1
SEPT.

IND.



\$3M

IN THE
SENSATIONAL
DIRTY
SOUTH
STYLE!

NO LIMIT
SOLDIERS
BATTLE
PLAYA WATER
ONE OF THE
STRANGEST
SUPER-FOES OF ALL

NO LIMIT SOLDIERS



TRU 2 DA GAME

■■■■■■■■■■ The Rise and Rise of NO LIMIT RECORDS ■■■■■■■■■■

by War Arrow

■■■■■■■■■■

FOR A LONG TIME THE STATE OF US HIP-HOP WAS dominated by rivalry between the East and West coasts. This was a war waged largely with turntables and microphones, but occasionally matters escalated into exactly the kind of tragedy that resulted in the deaths of 2Pac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. The loss of two fine young rappers, neither of whom could be described as peripheral to the whole scene, caused shock waves that are still felt today. There's been a whole lot of sobering up going on, and thankfully the East-West divide is not so great or fraught with tension as was once the case. Whilst all eyes were focused on the big two, few noticed that a clichéd redneck prophesy was coming true. The claim on the bumper sticker that 'the South will rise again' has been borne out, although thankfully not in the way hoped for by the guy behind the wheel wearing the Confederate pin on his stonewashed denims. Southern hip-hop, the proverbial quiet one at the back, has grown up to be the one that hits the home runs and leaves the others on the starting block wondering what happened. Even some of New

York's finest (and I don't mean the NYPD) have taken to emulating the characteristic Southern drawl. Down South hustlers of note include Organized Noise, Sleepy's Theme, Suave House, OutKast, Young Bleed, and Goodie MOB. From Virginia there's Timbaland, Missy Elliot, and their cast of associates. New Orleans is a place sometimes erroneously anthropomorphised into a chicken-sacrificing drag queen, swapping gumbo recipes with Swamp Thing in fluent French at the Mardi Gras, whilst batting away mosquitoes

with an accordion. What mugs we are. From New Orleans come Juvenile, B.G., Cash Money Records, and...(dramatic pause) the No Limit empire.

It's normally mighty oaks that spring up from tiny acorns, but in this case it's a whole forest. In 1989 No Limit Records was a shop specialising in hip-hop and the like, set up in Richmond, California by owner, Percy Miller, a young black man brought up in the 3rd Ward Calliope Projects of uptown New Orleans, which Silk The Shocker describes as 'a small place where death occurs a lot'. By March 1990 he'd done enough business to finance a four-track cassette of his own take on the rap game, and so with *What's The Deal* being snapped up from the shop's shelves, Master P was born. At first, promoting his own music, and that of his group The Real Untouchables, was an uphill struggle. St Charles Thurman, head of the Solar Music Group says at the time 'P couldn't sell a fart. No-one wanted him. They said he sounded like some country fool.' Nevertheless, this was one good man who really couldn't be kept down. In 1995 a distribution deal was struck with L.A.'s Priority Records and No Limit took off as a label in its own right. And it hasn't stopped since, proving the name to be prophetically accurate. That 'country fool' is now the big cheese of a company worth something in the region of \$300 million. No Limit have branched out into clothing, sportswear, training shoes, real estate, sports management, stand up comedy, films, books, gas stations, fast food restaurants, and even (brace yourselves) toys. Yes, Master P can be yours in the form of the talking Master P Action Man style doll. Wearing the combat camouflage that is synonymous with No Limit, he says a range of phrases which I'd guess include 'ya heard me?' and 'Uhhh', which will make more sense if you're familiar with Master P's approach to the microphone. In addition, P now plays professional basketball for The Fort Wayne Fury in the CBA league, which isn't exactly the big one, but neither is it small change. All this and he's not yet 30. I don't know if any attempts to put No

Limit soldiers into space are planned, but I wouldn't be surprised if P has a whole crew of homeboy scientists building rockets and lunar landers even as I write. 'Country fool' indeed!

Rap has often been criticised for its rampant materialism, and as one example there's little evidence to suggest that No Limit as a label holds with anything that could be mistaken for a Buddhist approach to worldly riches. Mia X's claim to wear 'more ice than an igloo' kind of tells you where they're coming from, as if this wasn't glaringly apparent from the covers. Much of No Limit's recent cover design is the work of the Pen and Pixel Graphics company, who aren't shy of portraying their subjects as the millionaires some of them undoubtedly



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are. One of my own surreal favourites is the cover to C-Murder's *Bossalini* album. Under yer man's name picked out in golden superhero letters, encrusted as always with diamonds, stands the ghetto millionaire himself, cigar in hand, dressed so sharply in best Mafiosa pinstripes as to make Bryan Ferry look like a piss-stained greaser. In the background there's the pristine collector's car with door open spilling a mountain of rubies, emeralds and sapphires out onto the gravel drive of the mansion. Of course it's materialistic. But it's no different from the Mod thing of the 1960s where kids from impoverished homes would turn up to work dressed smarter than the boss, riding a ton of gleaming chrome with a scooter hidden somewhere beneath. Admittedly, with a series of covers featuring ever greater numbers of limousines, helicopters and mansions, No Limit take the aesthetic a bit further, until it finds its greatest expression in the diamond-studded tank which, piloted by mobsters, forms the No Limit logo, threatening to crush the opposition beneath caterpillar tracks of solid 24 carat.

Some may find all this a little pompous, but it always seems to be folk who've grown up in a safe and comfortable environment, who can afford the luxury of pointless moral superiority. Master P and his younger brothers C-Murder and Silkk The Shocker, grew up in a place where sushi restaurants and vegetarian wholefood collectives were probably not so commonplace as crack dens or shootings, and indeed it is the place where Kevin, the fourth Miller brother, lost his life. So the opportunity to acquire a bit of wonga and get the hell out of there may not have presented itself as much of a quandary. Most of the world's problems seem to result from one half prescribing what they think is best for the other half.

No Limit's roster comprises artists from in and around the New Orleans area. Joining the three Miller boys are Mia X and Mystikal, and from Long Beach California, Snoop Dogg. Mia X was discovered by P in 1994. He met her working behind the counter of a record shop in downtown New Orleans. Mia, C-Murder, and Snoop are reviewed in detail elsewhere, so for the moment I'll focus more closely on the others.

Silkk The Shocker is the youngest Miller brother and the one who, much to his bewilderment, has of late been saddled with the mantle of No Limit's resident heart-throb, on which subject he says 'I'm not tryin' to be that. I'm tryin' to be myself, and if y'all like tall, skinny, thuggish niggas, whatever, then I'm cool. I'm in. But if not, then I'm still gonna rely on my rappin'.' With multi-platinum sales under his belt one can't really argue. His nom de rap was changed from just plain Silk after it turned out that this was already

taken, and had The Shocker epithaph added by the public misconception that the first album's title was actually part of his name.

Mystikal was the first New Orleans MC to achieve wider recognition outside his home state of Louisiana, which is not surprising given his bizarre talent, beside which even masters of the apeshit-crazy-bonkers school of mic technique like Busta Rhymes sound positively sedate. His lyrics are intelligible, but not always on first

listen. With his fluent New Orleans intonation and unorthodox sense of volume, it's not so much that he raps as explodes in time to the music. I am never less than startled when I'm listening to someone's album, getting into the lyrical flow of it all, and Mystikal suddenly makes a guest appearance in the same way that B-52s made a guest appearance in Vietnam. Each time he does his thing, it's hard not to visualise the complicated system of gates and cages originally designed for the velociraptors of *Jurassic Park*, now adapted in the service of getting Mystikal into the studio without loss of human life or half of the surrounding land being vapourised in a scatterburst of armour-piercing lyrics. He drops rhymes onto tape like Enola Gay dropped bombs on Japan.

All of which may leave the reader wondering what it actually sounds like. No Limit are often described as purveyors of languid shuffling beats, and certainly they are no strangers to the wah-wah guitar, slow squelchy Roland 303 style bassline, or brushed snare drum. What with this being about New Orleans and all, it'd be a bit obvious to go on about 'a rich musical gumbo of spicy Southern grooves', but only because in part it's true, although that isn't the whole story. Central to No Limit are Craig B., KLC, Mo B. Dick, O' Dell and Carlos, collectively known as Beats By The Pound. This inventive crew are responsible for much, although not all, of the No Limit sound. You'd think that what with more than twenty tracks a CD, and an album from someone or other coming out at least once a month, they'd be spreading themselves a bit thin by now. If this is the case, I've yet to hear the artist who ended up with their duff numbers. Aside from the Southern fried gumbo stuff mentioned above, they've been to some pretty unusual places in their time during the pursuit of travelling beyond hip-hop's final frontier. The fact that this happens most notably on Mia X albums is also a good indication of how each piece is tailored to suit the individual artist. I can't see Mia being much of a big Laibach enthusiast but 'Let's Get It Straight' from *Unladylike* and the title track of her latest, certainly makes you wonder. 'Let's Get It Straight' builds up an orchestral tsunami over a bed of foreboding kettle drums as Mia raps and Mystikal achieves critical mass in a nearby lead-lined studio bunker. Mia X's fine albums being a subject I find it hard to tear myself away from, her earlier *Good Girl Gone Bad* is equally notable for its dense atmosphere. Although no doubt done in a recording studio, it's so intense as to suggest the whole album took place on an urban street corner under a baking midday sun, about three minutes before a full-scale riot kicks off.

Leaving musical style aside for a moment, there are other non-geographical factors which unite those who ride the tank. An underlying flirtation with military imagery for one, manifested in the camouflage fixation, dog tags, and frequent references to Colonel Master P and his No Limit soldiers. Perhaps in Mystikal's case this stems from his participation in Operation Desert Storm, and it's a little worrying to consider what he'd be like on a battlefield, given that he doesn't exactly take prisoners in the recording studio. Beyond the surface appearance however, there is a more disturbing common ground: the death toll that is a terrible inevitability of living in young black America. As was mentioned earlier, the three Miller brothers lost Kevin, the fourth of their number, to the 3rd Ward Projects. Similarly Mia X and Mystikal's albums are haunted by the deaths of loved ones, and every year the lists of RIPs that appear among the sleeve notes of No Limit releases seem to have a few extra names added.

This is probably sufficient grounds for paroxysms of smug self-congratulation amongst the 'gangsta rap breeds violence' crusaders, and this in itself illustrates what dangerous imbeciles these people are. In recent years there's been a strong trend towards blaming acts of violence on something heard on a record, whether by Judas Priest, N.W.A., or Joy Division. The whole idea is fundamentally absurd. Perhaps it's true that few people have gone on a killing spree after listening to John Denver, but then someone with a grudge and the will to carry it out isn't likely to do so just because of a record. Probably they might listen to music that in some way appears to understand their madness,



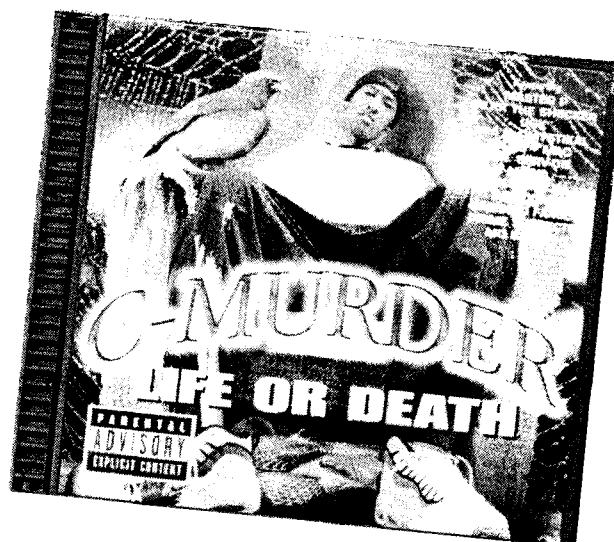
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often authored by someone who knows what it's like to live on the fringes of mainstream society, surrounded by bad shit. Charles Manson loved The Beatles and The Beach Boys, but only an idiot would suggest such music inspired the murders he was either directly or indirectly responsible for. True enough, Manson read bizarre conspiracies into *The White Album*, which are alleged to have prompted what ensued. If you firmly believe that civilisation will end in a bloody race war, from which you can only escape by hiding underground, emerging later to lord it over the dumb black victors who realise they still need whitey to rule them, then you'll probably be crazy enough to read affirmation of this into wallpaper patterns, the sound of gurgling water pipes, or Arthur Askey routines. Music can't be used as a scapegoat. Gangsta rap talks about the world it sees, and is a way of escaping the ghetto before your head gets blown off. Neither is it good enough to claim that hip-hop glorifies violence. With both her best friend and the father of her children dead from shootings, is it surprising that the subject crops up in Mia X's lyrics? Is it really likely that she raps about the gangsta lifestyle or contemplating murder because she thinks drive-by shootings are just too much fun? When C-Murder talks us through some act of random violence and the subsequent adrenalin rush, too many of us take it on face value. Sure he's been there, it comes with the territory, which isn't a place you can easily run away from if that's where your roots are buried. If you live in gangland then you have the choice of living by those rules, or probably not living very long. To say that gangsta rap encourages violence is to make the tedious and disgusting assumption that rappers, being black, are not intelligent enough to discuss anything on any but the most rudimentary level. When Freddie Mercury sang 'Mama, I just killed a man', was there a police enquiry? Gangsta rap, like all good literate dialogue, covers its subject on many levels, with characters going through different situations irrespective of the author's take on the matter. By placing the listener in the centre of the story and asking 'how d'ya like them apples?', Rap is largely a realist medium. Songs by Yes, Caravan and Gong have no direct equivalent within hip-hop. It's not often that you'll hear a rapper talking about anything he doesn't have direct experience of, and this is the key to hip-hop's appeal. As Silkk The Shocker says: 'I know people gonna feel this music 'cuz they just like me. I'm willin' to bet that wherever you from, you seen something I seen. Or if you ain't seen as much of it, you know it exist. And that's what you gotta realise when you makin' music - we all alike'.

For me, this explains admirably why No Limit records contain more than just funky tunes. In my secret identity of Joe Lunchpail, the overworked and underpaid blue collar schmoe, although I've never even seen a gun, I know too well what it's like to desperately NEED to fuck someone's shit up in order to stop them continually doing the same to yours. Several years ago a colleague, having been pushed too far by an unsympathetic management, attacked the boss with a broom handle. Robbie (as I'll call him), although sacked, was well remembered, eulogised by shop-floor song for years to come, notably the stirring refrain of 'Robbie _____ - he's our mate! He's our mate! He's our mate! Robbie _____ - he's our mate! He smacks guv'nors!'

The No Limit crew have lived through much worse than I, but we seem to speak the same language. We all know what it's like to be forcibly introduced to realities far more unpleasant than not getting a good enough seat at the opera. This particular cast of quite a few have found a way of dealing with ghetto living, whether it be as lyrical educators telling the stories that desperately need to be told, or as the generation that has shown there is a way to escape from a lifestyle that will kill you sooner rather than later. In

the process they've made some truly incredible records of wit, anger, humour and profound intelligence; retained their independence and artistic credibility (No Limit is one of the world's largest independent record companies, and is entirely black-owned); and made a ton of money, some of which is paying for the construction in Baton Rouge of what will be America's largest recording studio. In other words, like the album title says, they've stayed Tru 2 Da Game.



Selected No Limit Discography

- ☐ **C-Murder** *Life or Death '98*
Bossalinie '99
- ☐ **Fiend** *There's One In Every Family '98*
Street Life '99
- ☐ **Kane and Abel** *The 7 Sins '96*
Am I My Brother's Keeper? '98
- ☐ **Master P** *Ice Cream Man '95*
Ghetto D '97
- ☐ **Mia X** *Good Girl Gone Bad '95*
Unladylike '97
Mama Drama '98
- ☐ **Mr Serv-On** *Life Insurance '97*
Da Next Level '99
- ☐ **Mystikal** *Unpredictable '97*
Ghetto Fabulous '98
- ☐ **Silkk The Shocker** *The Shocker '96*
Charge it 2 Da Game '98
Made Man '99
- ☐ **Snoop Dogg** *Da Game Is To Be Sold,*
Not To Be Told '98
No Limit Top Dogg '99
- ☐ **Tru** *True '95*
Tru 2 Da Game '97
Da Crime Family '99

Other No Limit artists have been: Big Ed; Da 504 Boyz; DJ KLC; Full Blooded; Gambino Family; Ghetto Commission; King George; Lil Soldiers; Mac; Mercedes; Mo B. Dick; Porsha; Prime Suspects; Q.B.; Short Circuit; Skull Dugrey; Sons Of Funk; Soulja Slim; Steady Mobbin'; Tank Dogg; Two For One.

Sources: *Vibe* magazine, *Rap Pages*, *XXL* magazine, No Limit website

Note: the curious are best advised to visit their nearest specialist hip-hop retailer if seeking No Limit releases, as generally they will only charge normal CD prices. Unlike, off the top of my head, HMV and Virgin, who want £18 and upwards for albums by C-Murder and Mia X (*Mama Drama* was going for a wallet-bashing £19.99 in one of these naughty shops), presumably on the grounds that we can be fooled into thinking we're getting some obscure and costly import.



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Herein(g) the Sonic Arts Union: an Anthology of Transformations

By Chris Atton



Teenbeat Introduction

THERE THEY ARE ON the dust jacket of Michael Nyman's *Experimental Music*: Alvin Lucier and Gordon Mumma, half of the Sonic Arts Union, the first group I ever wanted to join. Deep inside the book, a fuller photograph also depicts Ashley, insouciant and sullen with cigarette in mouth and Behrman as a lab technician. At the age of 15 I discovered Nyman's book in the library where I worked as a shelve. Nyman's book dealt with the music of the US and Europe that had been born from Cage's crucible. More so than Cage, the Sonic Arts Union appealed because 1) they were a group - and I was into groups; 2) they used electronics most of the time (like the tone generators used by Egg and Hawkwind? Like Eno's VCS3 in Roxy Music? I wondered); 3) none of my friends - even those who had discovered *The Faust Tapes* with me - would have heard anything like them.

And yet (in reverse order): 3) I hadn't heard them either and was not going to hear them (in ensemble) for another 25 years; 2) their use of electronics was a million miles from Hawkwind and Egg, where it was a little bit of dressing - though their processing was comparable to Eno's work with Roxy, certainly live and in radio sessions); and most importantly: 1) the Sonic Arts Union was not a group. Rather, as David Behrman has encouraged us to consider it, the Sonic Arts Union was an 'anthology' - a choice collection of opportunities for four young experimental composers in the 1960s to have their music played by sympathetic musicians (themselves), even if it was to tiny audiences. Common aims there were, it seems, in their approach: compositions as experiments in acoustic physics and through those experiments the transformation of sounds both natural and electronic through electronic processes. There was a further rewriting of the book on what comprised musical composition and what comprised a musical score. 'Established techniques were thrown away and the nature of sound was dealt with from scratch,' is how David Behrman has spoken of the early days of the Sonic Arts Union. 'From scratch' in more than one sense: not only in regard to technique, but in terms of what constitutes musical activity (much of the Union's work was part-acoustical experiment, part-performance art, part-musical composition), what constitutes the score (instructions for performers, circuit diagrams, maps showing how instruments and electronic systems would be disposed in a performance space: all could be - and were - scores). 'From scratch' also in scratch-built instruments, specifically electronic instruments and sound processing equipment. In an age where the synthesiser was a room-sized monster with a price tag to match, home-made synths were cheaper and portable; essential for a group that needed to go travel compactly and continuously there to get its music heard (founded in 1966, the Union toured extensively in North America and Europe until, it seems, as late as 1976).

The home-made also contained within it what the commercially made Moog didn't: uncertainty, along with modularised and randomised methods of construction and deployment. All of which afford a pleasingly unsafe haven for the fundamental practices in post-war musical experimentalism ushered in by Cage whose famous doctrine of experimental music ('as an act the outcome of which is unknown') may be comfortably applied to the work of the Union.

Material themes and appurtenances

Being primarily the natural resonant characteristics of musical instruments (pianos, snare drums) and environments (typically, rooms) along with a fascination with feedback. Finally, the Union soup was thickened by the essential flour of electronic transformation: of natural and electronic sounds. Of them all, it is Alvin Lucier who has pursued

these themes in his music most single-mindedly up to the present day. Where the other three have moved to other fields of musical expression (Ashley to avant-garde opera, of which more later; Behrman to more sophisticated, computer-mediated systems; Mumma blending conservatoire form and open form with the chamber works that he calls 'six-pack sonatas'), Lucier is relentlessly, calmly pursuing sonic experimentation that has a clarity of purpose and outcome that has changed hardly at all in the intervening 30 years.

Recent works such as *Wind Shadows* (1994) generate interference fringes and beating patterns from the interplay of microtonal scales played on a trombone and the unchanging frequency of a sine wave generator. *Music on a Long Thin Wire* dispenses with musicians altogether: the Lovely Music recording offers four twenty-minute

excerpts from his oscillating wire installation. As a member of the Sonic Arts Union, his pieces *The Duke of York* (1972) and *Bird and Person Dyning* (1975) are exemplary. The first he describes as a 'grotesque jukebox' - yet its rhythm remains. Lucier's classic work with the Union must be *I am Sitting in a Room*. This also transforms the voice, this time through a record-playback system that imprints the resonant frequencies of the room in which the tape is played and recorded onto Lucier's voice. His reading of a text (which comprises the instructions and purpose of the piece - the 'score') is progressively

destroyed; what remains is a disembodied, floating pulse of vocal 'sheen' in which during one performance, Lucier claims he could hear the melody of a Charles Ives tune. As Kyle Gann has noted, listening to Alvin Lucier's music is not about listening to the notes, it's about listening to how Lucier's methods sculpt the very air and transform the space around us.

Gordon Mumma's work with the Sonic Arts Union was similarly interested in resonance and transformation. Whilst Lucier's hesitancy with electronic construction impelled him to seek out simple systems and the minimum amount of equipment (Nicolas Collins has argued that Lucier's technical limitations resulted in very austere, but elegant solutions to his problems and draws comparisons with the minimalist art activity of the time), Mumma was the Union's electronics expert, building his own synthesisers from surplus store equipment and catalogue components - the precursor surely of much of the current interest in low-grade electronics amongst both improvisers and the electronica crowd (whoever they are). His 'Hornpipe' (1967) feeds a horn through his self-built 'cybersonic console' that maps the resonant frequencies of the room as they are 'signalled' by the horn. The resonant circuits of the console then attempt to complement those frequencies. The sound produced moves further from the sound of a horn and further to the 'ideal sound' of the room. Later works also use cybersonics; in the case of *Mesa* the characteristically rich harmonies and rhythmic drive of a bandoneon are, um, squeezed out through the circuitry to create large, discreet slabs of noise, surrounded by a desert of quiescence.

David Behrman acknowledges that everything he learnt about electronics he learnt from Mumma, specifically from a series of letters Mumma wrote to him in 1964, the first letter containing a circuit diagram for a ring modulator: Behrman was off. Behrman's *Wave Train* (1966) demonstrates his Sonic Arts Union work to best effect, I think. The piece brings together two of dominant Union interests: resonance and feedback. Microphones are placed on the strings of a grand piano. The gain is turned up until the system feeds back and excites the piano strings. Over fifteen minutes, the performers attempt to control the feedback system and, in Behrman's words 'try to shape the raw feedback into large- resonant overlapping waves.' Once again, we are



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witness to an acousto-physical experiment that employs simple technology, yet results in a music of remarkable grace and poise: the New Age surf breaking over the gravel-laden cement mixer of sympathetic resonance (as they say). More recent works by Mumma focus on the interaction between computer-generated tones and instrumentalists. Unlike much of the rather sterile manifestations of this technique (such as much of the work from IRCAM), Behrman's *On the Other Ocean* (1977) finds flute and bassoon improvising around six pitches to which a computer responds, offering the players 'harmony-changing messages.' As with all of Behrman's works - including those employing feedback - there is a strong interest in the more reflective - dare one say contemplative? - use of electronics.



Discographising

The twenty-five years that have elapsed since my first encounter with the Sonic Arts Union have found me piecing together an audio history of their work through a small but steady number of releases. To approach the music through recordings alone is hardly to tell much more than a partial history, the more so when I focused here on recordings that (I trust) are still on catalogue, to avoid frustration in that rare reader stimulated enough to seek out the examples for themselves (there may be other examples I'm ignorant of, I grant you).

Where two dates are given, the first is the date of the original (vinyl) release. The second the currently-available CD reissue. I believe that all items are currently available.

A Theatre of Sound?

That cover photo of the Union on Nyman's book wouldn't fill the stadium rock enthusiast with much hope: Lucier standing rather awkwardly gazing into space; Mumma behind him almost absent-mindedly blowing his horn (as it were) - not a dynamic entrance. Ten years on and Lucier still appears ill at ease in a review of his work by Charles K. Noyes (writing in *Musics*), where he characterises Lucier as 'a very old and tired businessman.' No such problems for Robert Ashley whose performances with Union were, by all accounts, melodramatic in the extreme (if only at times by comparison with Lucier's shuffling). Nyman describes his *The Wolfman* as (1964) 'a highly projected "theatre of effect" evoking a 'sinister night-club atmosphere.' The piece is a vocal improvisation that deploys feedback controlled by the vocal cavity; I haven't found a recording of this, but its technique suggests sonic parallels with Henri Chopin's audio poems. What we do have, however, is the tape collage used by Ashley as a background to the piece. The collage is called 'Wolfman' (no definite article) and it appears as such on the first Bob James record, *Explosions*, recorded in 1965 for ESP-DISK. Bob James went on to write the theme to Taxi and pursue a very profitable career in cocktail jazz: *Explosions* is his finest moment, naturally, the only free jazz he ever released and the only collaborative work the Union undertook with jazz musicians. 'Wolfman' begins with a distorted melange of speeded-up American adverts and racing cars whilst James and his trio swing out atonally, clearly oblivious to the mayhem with which Ashley is obliterating them. He succeeds: the closing minutes of the piece find the tape alone, blurring out its hysterical motor racing commentary to fade. Mmmm, that's nice. The best thing that ever happened to Bob James. I'll go further: one of the best things to happen to jazz.

Elsewhere the trio work out over the electronics of Gordon Mumma and Robert Ashley. There's some fine Ashley feedback in *Untitled Mixes* which is sadly spoiled by Barre Phillips's (bass) attempted mimicry. Mumma's contribution is muted, comprising an all-too-brief blurring of what sounds like a tape-manipulated version of 'Hornpipe' through 'Peasant Boy', the CD's opener. Still a fine curio for Union archivists and guaranteed to upset later Bob James fans (wherever they are).

Ashley's theatricality has since been channelled into his intimate operas of which the 3 hour *Perfect Lives* (1983) remains his chef d'oeuvre. Even more intimate - and more successful, because of that - is his *Private Parts* record of 1978, which previews the opening and closing scenes of *Private Lives*. Ashley's low-key, laconic recitation draws you into the ordinary but skewed world of his protagonist, Isolde: 'she leads a double life: she makes two from one and one', replete with arcane philosophical allusion: 'Giordano Bruno comes to mind, whoever he is.'

□ Robert Ashley, *Private Parts (The Record)*, Lovely Music LCD 1001, 1978/90

□ Robert Ashley, *Perfect Lives*, Lovely Music CD 4917(3) (3 CD s), 1991 or as a cheap double cassette on Lovely Music CA 4913-47

□ David Behrman, *On the other ocean*, Lovely Music LCD1041, 1978/96

□ David Behrman, *Wave Train*, Alga Margen plana-B 5NMN.020, 1998

□ Bob James, *Explosions*, ESP 1009-2, reissue on ZYX-Music, 1965/no reissue date

□ Alvin Lucier, *Bird and Person Dyning/The Duke of York*, Cramps CRSCD 111, 1975/no reissue date

□ Alvin Lucier, *I am sitting in a room* Lovely Music LCD 1013, 1981/90

□ Alvin Lucier, *Music on a Long Thin Wire*, Lovely Music LCD 1011, 1980/92

□ Alvin Lucier, *Panorama*, Lovely Music, LCD 1012, 1997 - on which you'll find 'Wind Shadows'

The *Wave Train* CD also contains the only performance by all four members of the Sonic Arts Union I have been able to find. This is Behrman's 'Runthrough' (1967-68), an electronic duo improvisation mediated by the other two performers operating photo-sensors that distribute the sound in space. These Records are the place to go for Alga Marghen stuff. Alga Marghen themselves are at: c/o Emanuele Carcano, via Frapolli 40, 20133 MILANO, Italia.

No recordings by Gordon Mumma are currently available - save for the fragment on that Bob James CD - but I bought a copy of *Pontpoint, Mesa, Fwyyn* (Lovely Music LP 1092, 1987) from Lovely Music a couple of years ago. Not listed as available on their catalogue, however they might have an odd copy still around if you write/email them: Lovely Music, Ltd., 10 Beach Street, New York, NY 10013, USA. Email: info@lovely.com. Lovely are planning a CD release of Mumma's electronic works, including 'Pointpoint' from that LP, but not 'Mesa', sadly. Alga Marghen, I believe, are also planning a Gordon Mumma release.

Brandon LaBelle "renderings of alternative worlds"

Interview by ED PINSENT

MAPS OF TENDERNESS

Brandon LaBelle

BRANDON LABELLE IS A SOUND ARTIST BASED IN LOS ANGELES. HIS work has interested me ever since he first sent CDs to the magazine - starting with *Prima Materia*, released in 1996. Without understanding how the records were made, they always fixed my attention and made me drop everything, just to relax and listen. When LaBelle visited the UK in 1999 the chance to interview him in person seemed to good to miss. Needless to say, I did miss it - and so we ended up 'chatting electronically', as he calls it. A little background about the fellow before we drop in: he is a curator of art sound events, editor and writer for *Errant Bodies*, *Feed Ink* and *Coil*; into academic theory, writing about 'sound affecting subjectivity'; also performs with Farflung; his id battery project is a duo with Loren Chasse; the work results from walks and investigating the environment; he creates deliberately unrecognisable sounds, a process compounded by the mechanics of recording.



EP Let's start with Maps Of Tenderness.../ just read Umberto Eco's novel The Island of The Day Before.. Readers will know of a chapter with this exact same heading. Any connection there?

BLB 'Maps of Tenderness' actually comes from an 17th century writer named Madeleine de Scudéry. She was an aristocrat who wrote novels as well as made drawings. These drawings often related to narratives and were basically conceived of as imaginary maps, or renderings of alternative worlds.

These maps depicted a land full of sentiment. Places names such as 'The Lake of Hope', 'Unknown Lands of Passionate Love', etc. What intrigued me about her maps is this relationship between reality and the imaginary: how the two are made up of the other, continually interface and influence the other. So, a map refers to a space and also abstracts it, imagining it from a certain perspective. I think its an interesting graphic form, or symbolic system which is also about 'organising' this imaginary-real material. *Maps of Tenderness*, the release on SELEKTION, I think of in this way: it engages with the materials of particular spaces and at the same time, through the act of recording, of 'composing', it proposes an organisation, or imaginary relations--it fantasises yet retains an interest in the real.

EP What is your background, eg in training or basic grounding in art. Have you always lived in LA?

BLB I pretty much grew up in Los Angeles, though travel as much as I can. I had the opportunity to live in London in the early 90's which thoroughly changed my attitude towards music, or rather, brought me back into considering it as a practice. This was when a lot of great alternative punk music was happening in Camden Town (particularly at The Falcon--maybe you were there?). It basically inspired me to get back into drumming. So when I got back to LA the following year I hooked up with a group of artists and musicians while studying at Cal Arts and started a band called Helianthus. This was quite an experience--sort of an industrial jazz, very free form and intense. I started using contact microphones in relation to drums, which was quite interesting. Then, of course, I started considering the contact microphone in itself, as an instrument to use with other objects and digital effects, etc. This was quite a radical moment for me. It opened a lot of mental and imaginary doors, which are still in the process of opening. But it was always in relation to art more than music. As an art student I interacted very little with the music department, even though Cal Arts has an incredible history and curriculum. It just didn't seem like the right context. Art I think in general is much more about ideas, ideas which expand outward and have a relation to the world, social and political concerns (at least this is part of its history and discourse) whereas music seems to often close in on itself, remain within its own confines and concerns. This of course is a generalisation, but it led me to feel more stimulated by the context of art, or maybe, more at home. Though I feel that the experimental music scene is much more aligned with concerns and interests outside of itself and ideologically engaged. This I find very promising.

EP What is it about the environment that inspires and interests you?

BLB For me, it is above all a social question: how am I able to live in the location that I find myself? How can I position myself so as to engage with my surroundings in a way which will have interesting and positive effects. It is also political--how can I act, how can I understand the determinants which shape my place in the world and further, how can I contribute to these determinants consciously. Yet this relationship is sensual also, in that, as a body, as a physical being I am moved by the perceptual intensities of the world around me. In essence, I am compelled by my surroundings as they stir and direct me. This is both beautiful and terrifying, in that I am held in this medium of the perceptual. So I think my interest in the environment, in context, is an interest in understanding how I am held, how I am a part of relationships, and further, to involve myself in this process critically and creatively.

EP Is it primarily the urban and modern environment rather than rural that you're concerned with?

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BLB Oh, I'm not sure. I have a mixed desire to both live in an urban environment--to be a part of a greater social context--and to drop out, to give up participating and retreat, lose myself in the forest.

EP Do you see yourself as part of any tradition of field recordings - eg Luc Ferrari's Presque Rien, or developments in gallery art, conceptual art, installations?

BLB I'd say you pretty much nailed all my interests in one sentence! Or at least a handful.

The act of field recording has taught me a great deal: about music, about the environment, about the question of my place as a listener, a participant in a greater context. It has taught me a lot about composition, how the process of 'framing' a sound leads one to music, to a social language. Working with sound-installation, with 'gallery-art' as a cultural institution has led me to an understanding of the conditions of a given space--as an artist one always has to confront the context in which the work is viewed and experienced. This is what conceptual art was so pointedly engaged with. And this work--that is, work around the mid-60s to early 70s--I still find so fresh, so compelling, in its form, its process and creativity. Musique concrète I also feel is still such a compelling music, because it also sought to question its own medium (recording) and its place within a broader environment. It was self-reflexive.

EP The sounds on record are always impossible to identify. Is this deliberate, art concealing art?

BLB No, not really. Often I am surprised by sounds, particularly if they originate from an ordinary object or event. The mediation of the microphone and the recording device alters the original sound, and this can be quite interesting in that it presents one with a 'strange' sound, or an interesting aural experience. But I don't think it's an intention from the start. I find that I work by being directed by what is already occurring. So it is more a question of following what I am given, and allowing it to compel the creative process, to be revealed in a way.

EP What is the intended effect, if any, on the listener - to show us how to connect

more to the space around us? To stimulate ideas and propose actions, rather than just make a soothing noise?

BLB I think the question of 'audience' is a difficult one. This question is something I am interested in considering more directly, something which an artist like Achim Wollscheid is answering in very interesting and provocative ways.

For now, I have to say that often it is about directing one's attention to something overlooked, to bring something from the background to the foreground, and to present an opportunity to 'hear' this background in order to understand the details of one's surroundings. So, in essence, music offers the opportunity to explore this process--it allows access to this opportunity.

EP Who is Achim Wollscheid? What are his interesting and provocative ways?

BLB Achim Wollscheid is an artist from Frankfurt who has been working with sound since the early 80s. His early recorded works were released under the name S.B.O.T.H.I., and he was also involved with P16.D4. He is also one of the main people behind the label SELEKTION, along with RLW.

Achim is very involved with working directly in relation to context--looking at the specifics of a space, etc and responding to this, either through permanent installations or performative gestures. One thing about a space which I think does get overlooked is the question of people--the multitude. A space is never neutral, it is contaminated by interferences, and one of the major interfering elements is people. Achim has a great way of working with the presence of an audience, or passers-by, by incorporating their presence into the work, either by using sensing devices that trigger sounds and lights in relation to the movements of individuals, or incorporating an



audience into creating the performance piece itself--reactions and responses become part of the very mechanism of the work. So, as an audience member one becomes aware of oneself in an interesting way, how one is caught up in the processes and compositional tools at work.

EP I always find it compelling enough to listen to the entire work all the way through. Why should this be? There are changes, though not dramatic ones - yet nothing seems to be revealed or explained by the conclusion, yet I come away oddly satisfied.

BLB For me, there is a sense about a work being 'whole', that it consists of smaller elements all of which contribute to a greater piece. This is how I hear records, how I hear music--that whatever element is presented it is part of a greater work--again, maybe its about detail.

EP Would you care to describe some of the techniques you use in recording and editing, unless you prefer to keep it mysterious.

BLB There really is no mystery. The thing to emphasise I think is that more and more I am interested in a very technically 'unelaborate' means of working. That is, that the finished product is quite raw and direct, minimal and untreated. I am not one to get caught up in treating sounds, effects and such. It remains incredibly lo-fi. This has been important in that it has taught me a great

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deal about sound itself, as it exists initially, phenomenally. Of course I realise that things could develop. But for now it has been important to strip things down rather than build them up.

EP Do the finished products satisfy you as records; were they intended as documents of something interesting that you heard and wanted preserving; or as an assembled statement in its own right.

BLB So far, the records have been very satisfying, both as documents of events and as 'music'. For me a record is an opportunity to present something, and this is quite a special presentation because it has the ability to be transplanted, reproduced and manipulated according to each listening. It is a very direct and intimate presentation, both social and yet very personal. This is what I like about making recordings, how they touch someone and at the same time can be referred to again and again, stimulate ideas and propose relationships.

EP Can you explain Guy Debord to me - have read about it and understand very little. What is a dérive / drifting? Does it stem from feelings of alienation in the city?

BLB Guy Debord and The Situationists were an interesting group of artists and political renegades in the 50s and 60s. But it is also tied to a very specific cultural and historical moment when Paris after the war was being reconstructed, influenced by the Marshall Plan of the US. The Situationists attempted to thwart this reconstruction which they felt was dictating a new way of living determined by a more open shift towards capitalism. Their projects developed as a way to both combat this bureaucratic imposition and to propose creative alternatives to living. Part of this resulted in architectural plans and ideas to practices such as the dérive which was more an attempt to disrupt one's own psychology in order to envision new forms of productivity, ones more connected to the imagination, spontaneity and creative play, as opposed to pre-fabrication and advanced industrialisation.

So, yes, I'd say the dérive comes about partly from a sense of alienation, not so much from the city itself, but from the bureaucratic project of urban design and architectural visions that impose a plan onto the masses as opposed to arising from within the masses.

The Situationists above all wanted to empower the individual to determine his or her own reality as experienced everyday--and to create situations where this could happen.

Their project has been of interest to me for some time, and I find there is a lot to learn from how they approached the conditions of their environment, political frustration, and social space, and sought alternative means.

live work:

tour of Germany and Sweden, 1999--this tour went extremely well, and developed out of my recent release on the SELEKTION label, *maps of tenderness*. I wanted to develop live performances in relation to this release. So I compiled a series of sounds/objects which I felt I could 'perform', manipulate creatively and present improvised work. Each performance was quite unique, especially as each space was so individual, from clubs to galleries to other spaces.

Sonic Perception conference, Tokyo Japan, 1999--this was organised by Minoru Sato from the WrK group in Tokyo. The conference is both academic and experimental, presenting performances and lectures. It was quite a challenge. I presented lectures and performances and tried to conceive of how they might relate to each other, expand the other in interesting ways. It also revolved around the idea of language having a relationship to sound.

exhibitions:

Most of these exhibitions were installation based on and involving the amplification of ambient sounds occurring in the space. These sounds were used as a kind of art material or object, and complemented by other visual and sculptural elements. They are related to the recorded works and at the same time are distinct from them.

1999 exhibitions

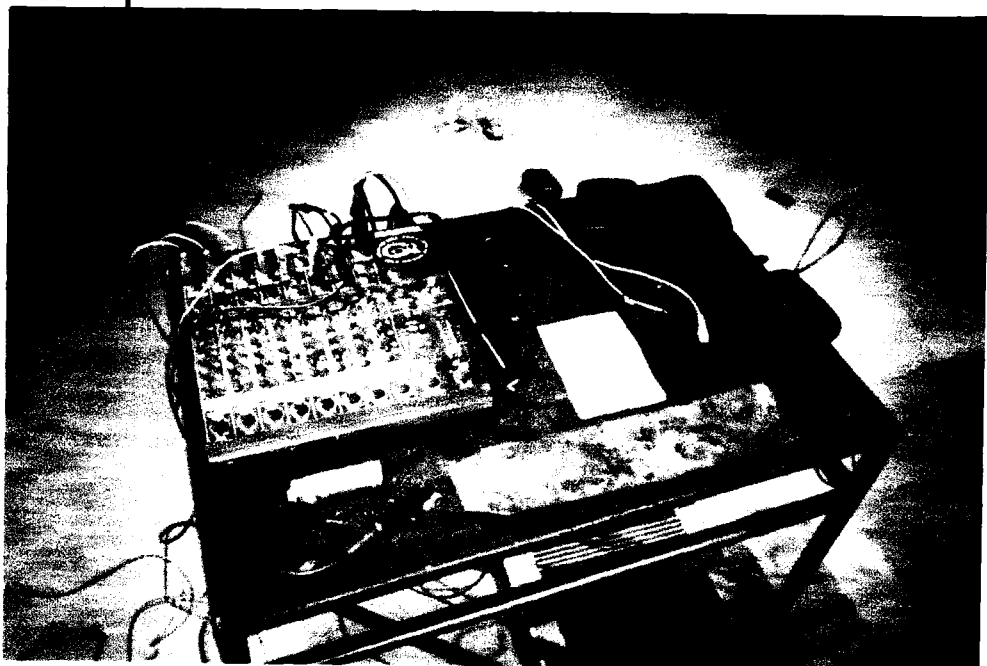
- 'Book of Vowels', Sig-Alert group show, Arizona State University Art Museum
- 'Tender Buttons: a transcription of Stein through Scriabin', WENZ gallery, Tokyo Japan
- 'Music Box', Post Office Box Mail Art project, Museum of Installation, London England
- 'Sound-Board' (walking a square block in Santa Ana), Sig-Alert 2, Cal State Fullerton, CA

1998 exhibitions

- 'Ear as Eye', Tokyo University art gallery, Tokyo Japan
- 'Tender Buttons', Second Nature group show, UCLA New Wight Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 'Writing Aloud', Sound group show, Refusalon Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 'Untitled 1998', Beyond Music Sound Festival, Beyond Baroque, Los Angeles, CA
- 'Genius Loci', Cal Arts, Los Angeles, CA
- 'Transmission', Reverb group show, The Brewery project, Los Angeles, CA
- 'roseisaroseisarose', Incredibly Soft Sounds group show, Gallery 101, Ottawa Canada
- 'The Pleasure of the Text', Text-Art group show, Cal Arts, Los Angeles, CA

publications:

I run a small press periodical called *Errant Bodies*. We published a literary/arts journal of the same name from '92 - '98. This year we published our first book, called *Site of Sound: of architecture and the ear*. I edited this with Steve Roden. The book focuses on the relationship between sound and space, music and architecture/environment. It is a really wonderful anthology including works by about 30 artists, architects and theorists. I'm very happy with this project and am planning further publications.





XXXXXXXXXXXX The Utter XXXX
FREAKDOM
Remarkably Outlandish Records

XXXXXXXXXXXX

monitoring his life. 'He'll be ready to be a hero, speaker', says another, which Cass takes to refer to his eventual career as a lecturer on the Psychic studies circuit, playing his stacks of tapes. 'Dead machines', intones a

The Ghost Orchid: An introduction to Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP)

TOUCH / THE PARAPSYCHIC ACOUSTIC RESEARCH COOPERATIVE, PARC CD1 (1999)

EVPs, put simply, are weird voices you hear on the radio. Since a friend of mine has his own story of a 'mystery' voice captured on a tape, I was intrigued by news of this CD. When his mum and sister played back a tape recorded on an apparently empty beach, the calm atmosphere was suddenly interrupted by a strange voice babbling in a Gaelic tongue. What could have caused it? Stray radio waves? Ghosts? Aliens?

This CD mostly represents the fruits of the labours of one Raymond Cass, and also of another team of researchers. They both have one thing in common - they think their radio sets are speaking directly to them.

Cass in particular has spent hours monitoring the airwaves and taping the results, and has thus captured lots of examples of phantom voices which, we are told, shouldn't be there by rights, and are possibly of unknown origin. Cass goes further and speculates that there are not only hidden meanings in the snippets he hears, but that in some cases they could be the voices of the dead, or even - you guessed it - aliens from outer space.

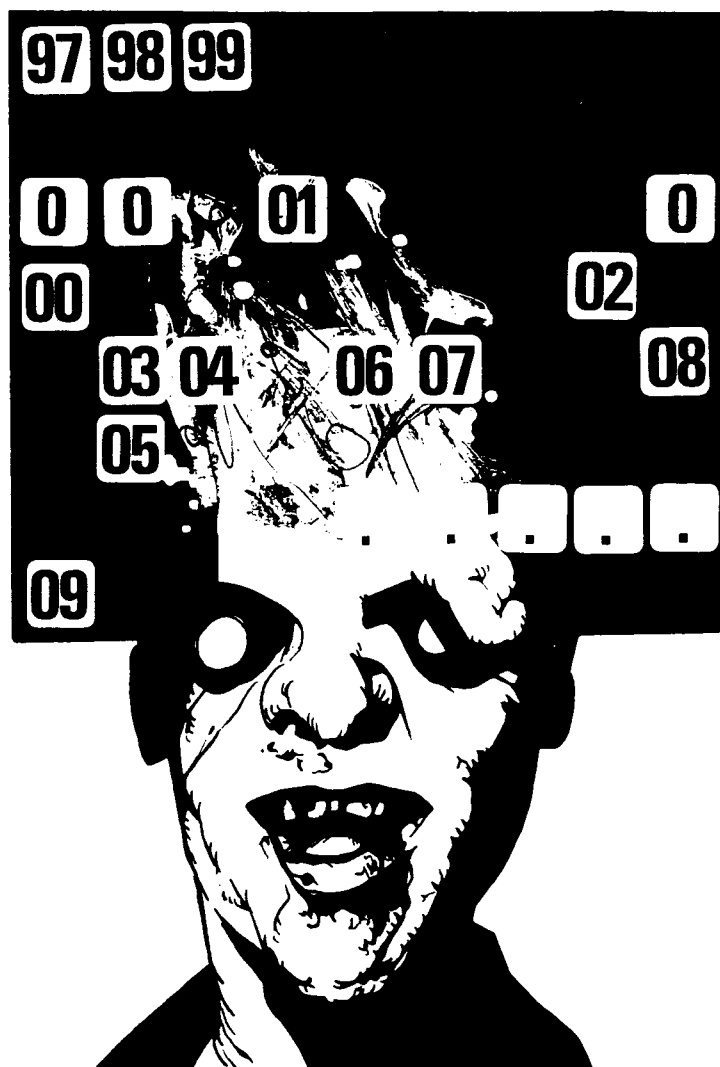
Sounds great, doesn't it? I was looking forward to playing this oddity, and have to say I was massively disappointed. Far from lengthy spells of inexplicable alien babble, or poltergeist-like messages from the Phantom Zone, we get only micro-second samples of shortwave radio fragments (repeated a few times for ease of use). They are for the most part presented without any context as to their source, any connective tissue; there is no evidence at all that they actually are what they are presented as; and besides, many of them are virtually unintelligible. The researcher however has convinced himself that the voices are saying something, and interprets the fragments for us. This is where it gets completely dotty. 'We can see Edith by radio,' says one voice, which Cass assumes is referring to his wife and takes it as evidence that some all-seeing higher power is

mechanical voice, which Cass concludes refers to an alien spaceship - he calls them 'probes' - whose batteries have run down.

Worse yet are the so-called 'polyglot' examples, where these strange entities are deemed to pick and choose which language they will choose to address the world, often changing tongue within the space of one utterance. The interpretations behind many of these EVPs is so tortured as to beggar belief...Cass applies the exact opposite of the Occam's razor principle, in that he makes the solution as complex as

possible, rather than simple. If you're prepared to accept his far-fetched theories on these, then you're well on the way to making anything mean whatever you want it to mean.

Actually this is all a bit sad. This is symptomatic of a very common paranoid delusion for which there are many recorded precedents in psychological history - that delusional state where the sufferer is convinced the TV is watching him, or the newspapers are writing about him. I propose that Raymond Cass, harmless and likeable though he be, is suffering similar delusions, and is finding meaning in radio voices that simply is not there. The other researchers, Margot Tschapke and Johannes Hagel, have similar delusions of grandeur, proposing astonishing leaps in faith in their readings of the most meaningless scraps of information - which they somehow take to be prophetic newscasts on the most trivial details of their life.



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This silly CD, with its extensive sleeve notes, appears to lend some legitimacy to all this nonsense, so thank heavens for Joe Banks, whose level-headed sleeve note (included here in the lengthy explanatory booklet) restores sanity to the proceedings. Identifying this delusional state as 'Rorschach Audio', he sets forth similar recorded cases where listeners have sworn blindly that they can hear clear voices emerging from tape loops of meaningless babble (and see below for more on this). Banks refers to the artistic side too; Dali's famous paranoiac-critical images, where the artist played the game of seeing hidden faces in other images, or in abstract shapes; seeing shapes in the fire is so common to us all it's likely to be a primordial human activity. The Surrealists, indeed, tried to live their lives by it; Andre Breton I think got married as a result of convincing himself that the chance words and sights he saw in the street on his promenade would act as augurs, signs and meanings to guide his decision.

Don't misinterpret me, though. I believe there are more things in heaven and earth, and I often get a secret thrill from watching documentaries with what purports to be UFO photos and footage. Without a doubt there are many inexplicable forces in the universe. But why must we always tie them down to the same stereotyped, predictable narratives every time? Any X-Files fan knows that there's a discernible pattern to every single alien abduction story, and even a low-grade social historian knows that this mass-hypnosis effect has many precedents throughout man's recorded history. The belief in Witchcraft is one of the best examples of a delusional narrative system, and that was in an age before mass communications!

Nonetheless, I thought to myself this Ghost Orchid could be an enjoyable listen - because it has moments of real frisson and weirdness. 'Just take it all with a pinch of salt', I thought. 'It's all harmless fun, right?' Well, maybe not. I mentioned this to Joe Banks, and he reminded me that this Rorschach Audio effect can be put to rather sinister uses. Remember the 'backwards-masking' scare of the 1980s in America? Religious right-wing pressure groups were generating hysterical scare stories, convinced that satanic messages were concealed in the grooves of Heavy Metal LPs. Play certain tracks backwards, they claimed, and you'd discover concealed messages either filled with poisonous sentiments that undermined society's conventional values - or worse still, specific messages directing youngsters to take their own lives. A spate of youth suicides was thus ascribed to this patently nonsensical theory.

There is a history of that same pattern of hysteria attached to certain rock records. The most notorious, of course, are attached to records by The Beatles; the inane cut-up of studio chatter in the run-out groove of *Sergeant Pepper* has been 'revealed' to say 'WE'LL FUCK YOU LIKE SUPERMEN' if played backwards. And in California, a cult dedicated to the misguided notion that Paul McCartney was dead, discovered hidden messages that narrated the entire circumstances concerning his demise, in the mysterious cut-ups of 'Revolution Number Nine'. And if you want the popular manifestation of the same thing, tune in to Never Mind the Buzzcocks and sit through the 'Unintelligible Lyrics' round. A serious article is waiting to be written on this subject, but you'll have to wait for it.

Still, with brilliant couplets like 'Put it On Ice and I'll Mend Your Feet', you can treat this as a spoken word CD of absurdist poetry.

ED PINSENT

Anal Magic and Rev Dwight Frizzell

Beyond the Black Crack

PARADIGM PD06 (1998)

Genuinely odd and genuinely obscure, at first this strikes you as an astonishing blend of free jazz, acid-addled psychedelia, industrial tape constructions, political protest poetry readings, found recordings and field recordings, scatological humour, electronic music, Mothers of Invention styled absurdity...which fairly well sums it up. A bit like the promises of the ESP label, the early Residents and Mother of Inventions records all come true at once. The common thread is the performer Revd Dwight Frizzell, aka Fredrik Tibbits Air, appearing throughout these astonishing recordings on wind instruments, percussion, and other non-instruments such as 'chair, trashcan, pins, soybeans, and audio oscillator.'

A curious tale of this record's history lurks within the booklet, revealing almost a parallel universe of freak madmen poised to assume a position of power. A tale that that unsettles your perception of what had passed for reality in your wretched existence up to this point! It emerged from a conglomerate of eccentric bands, taped at tiny little events: Black Crack and The Sole Survivors were recorded live at the Kansas City Art Institute Foundation in 1975; Fredrik's Cosmic Spaced Out Blues Band and Orchestra played at the Second RLDS Church chili supper in 1974 (hence all the farting and shitting jokes); the 'Turtle Music' tracks were recorded atop the midget pyramid in McCoy Park Missouri in 1976. These disparate items were compiled and released to commemorate the First Annual End of the World Celebration on 18 November 1976, and originally issued as a mono recording in an edition of 200 copies by Cavern Custom. The bonus tracks filling out this CD come from an equally insane enterprise, a work for electronic tape, performers and narrator called 'The Wandering Madness of Basilea, The Great Mother'.

This is something to get excited about. Let's face it, you and I would never find a vinyl copy of anything like this nor would we care to devote years of fruitless searching to finding it; if we even knew it existed in the first place, let's hear it for CD reissues! And hats off to the Paradigm label, in whose catalogue this does seem somewhat untypical - we look forward to further weirdies in a similar jugular vein...

ED PINSENT

Naked City

Black Box (collecting:)

Torture Garden 1991

Leng T'Che 1992

TZADIK TZ7312-2

Behind an intimidating black cover lurks a 'bargain' 2 CD collection from Tzadik with accompanying booklets chock full of Kinbaku rope bondage photos and paintings of decrepit molestor spider-men and eyeball-licking sailor ghouls. It's not 'Foster & Allen' granny!

Torture Garden - the ultimate album for sorting the sheep out from the goats - one minute in and the virgin listener is either laughing or begging you to turn this shit off. 40+ tracks, averaging a minute long, with titles like 'Thrash Jazz Assassin', 'Perfume of a Critic's Burning Flesh' and 'Jazz Snob Eat Shit' - all played with a thermonuclear level of vim by John Zorn and the boys from Naked City. Every musical genre - from cocktail lounge to surf guitar to death metal - is thrown into the cauldron and stirred in with neck-breaking jumpcuts at Zorn's mixing desk. Nothing hangs around enough to get dull and it all ends sounding a little bit like Slayer doing the music for a *Tom & Jerry* cartoon, which, knowing Zorn's admiration for Carl Stalling, was probably his intention. The cream topping on this barely digestible pie comes from Yamatsuka Eye of Boredoms infamy who brings his unique vocal approach to the proceedings. Screaming, grunting, barking and possibly vomiting down the microphone he brilliantly points out the uselessness of most 'rock' lyrics. It all ends with Eye clearing his throat and gobbing up what sounds like a greenie substantial enough to twat hedgehogs on the appropriately titled 'Gob of Spit'. This is the best asylum house band ever playing at the height of their powers - subsequent Naked City releases conformed to the law of diminishing returns. This is the only one you need.

Apart from 'Leng T'Che' of course. Previously released in Japan only this is a single 32 minute track inspired by an ancient Chinese torture method that involved staking the victim alive and slowly slicing off limbs and chopping out entrails and organs. Attempting to convey this in music, the only band really up to the job, sound not unlike Metallica at a sound check. It all builds painfully slowly; heavy heavy doom chords drop tons of concrete into a sinking oil tanker while Zorn lets the banshee's loose with throat-rippingly long blasts on the alto sax. Progressively it gets louder and louder, more players enter the fray, each dispensing their own particular brand of sonic grief until around the 20 minute mark the real action begins. Yamatsuka Eye steps up to the mic and launches into a terrifying series of screeches and lughows that sound like outtakes from Idi Amin's private collection. Most would bottle it at this point but that would be where this piece succeeds or fails - does it become actual 'torture' for the listener or do they bite down hard to experience the rest of this perfect pain?

For anyone, like myself, who doubts Zorn's aesthetic motives and output, this is an essential purchase. *Torture Garden* is one huge 'Fuck Off' to those who stand by pre-established artistic boundaries, Leng T'Che is simply 'Fucking Hell!'

RIK RAWLING

The Sound Projector Sixth issue 1999

Brast Burn

Debon

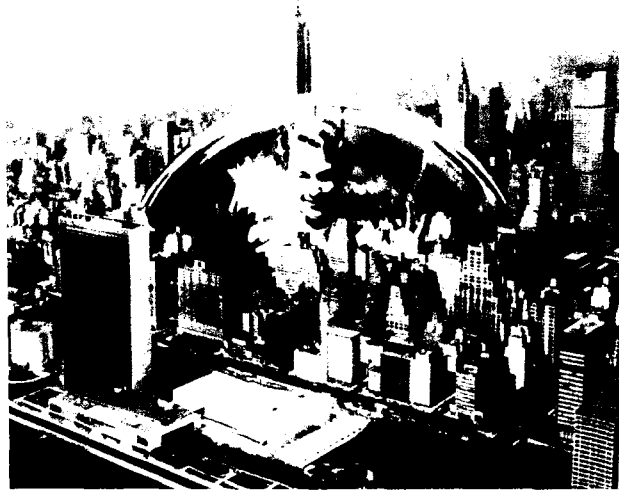
PARADIGM PD07 (1998)

Karuna Khyal

Alomoni 1985

PARADIGM PD08 (1998)

Two extremely strange artefacts from the deep, very deep Underground of mid-1970s Japan Rock music. They were both released on the Voice Records label (ie they're effectively home-made private press records), and it's suspected that the same personnel were involved in both LPs, but nobody really knows - these are genuinely mysterious obscurities! Brast Burn can be found on the original Nurse With Wound list, apparently (do you actually know anybody who uses that particular shopping list as their



cultural yardstick for excellence?). Although there's an undeniable 1970s German Rock influence here - in particular Damo Suzuki with Can - I think we should check in our 'rarer records than thou' one-upmanship at the door, and simply join hands as we admit that these are two blisteringly amazing records. True, they're somewhat disjointed and bitty, and appear to be held together with string and sellotape in places - but this only adds to the appeal and strange charm. We could almost guarantee you'll be smitten and kayoed by their overwhelming oddness.

Karuna Khyal's offering features two side-long tracks, in fact made up of a series of suites and episodes, although side one's highlight is a long repetitive loop track, with slide guitars, unintelligible fuzzed-out chanting, and an insane burst of harmonica blowing that makes it all sound like a plastic, transistorised version of 'Tarotplane' from Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band's *Mirror Man* LP. This is followed, totally unexpectedly, by a long disorienting passage of echoed and treated voices moaning and sighing, overdubbed with musique concrète backwards tapes and crashing metallic guitar mini-explosions. This record can be portentous, alarming and appears to be dangerously unhinged. Very desirable.

The Brast Burn LP is equally loopy. Again, two LP side-long suites - again edited together to maximum weirdness effect. Only three minutes in from the start and you've already lost the thread, lost in a maze of horrifying noises created by studio effects by persons with no respect for restraint or common decency. There follows another Damo Suzuki impression, in near-English lyrics, extended into another infuriatingly overdone looped workout. But the playing is irresistible - far less ponderous than most Krautrock, even including the beyond-reproach Can. Brast Burn's playing is much lighter and spacier than that, with a charmingly attenuated slide guitar sound, a purring keyboard of some description, and a polite but very insistent distorted drum machine throbbing away. This switches to a more pastoral theme, acoustic guitar and flute with hand drum, wailing away over the sound effect of the howling wind...now you know one of the true antecedents of Masaki Batoh's band, Ghost.

These are both truly weird records and snapshots of a vanished post-psychedelic period, trippy, acid-tinged and very progressive. I don't think anyone could even attempt to manufacture something as utterly freaked out as this, in today's jaded climate.

ED PINSENT

Die, Trip Computer, Die!

Stadium Death

ALCOHOL RECORDS ALDTCDD1 (1999)

I first saw these pranksters on 14 May 1994, supporting Tony Conrad as part of a mini-season called 'New Aura' organised by the LMC at Creative Block in North London. How we hated this duo...the entire audience seethed with rage at having this drivel inflicted upon us. Die Trip Computer Die blasted out their harsh, repellent electronic sounds, way too loud, performed their silly songs and screamed out their ugly vocals, all built around an embarrassingly contrived team of stage personas called 'Country Bumpkin' and 'City Slicker'. I deemed it the worst act I've seen in my entire life.

Thankfully this CD of theirs, arriving five years later, isn't quite as hideous as that described above. I can't really connect to it, but it remains one of the most eccentric records you'll ever hear, if you can make it that far - and the determination of the Trip Computers to stick with their valiantly unfashionable sound is something verging on the pathological. The only way I can describe it is as some very odd electro-beat styled near-pop songs, all dirtied up with thick greasy layers of noise and samples, and strained through some utterly cracked production methods. The synthesisers are tuned to absurdly wacky presets, the instrumentation is odd,

the samples are incoherent, and the voices are twisted into the most deliberately ugly shapes. Even their attempt at rap music, 'Ugly Deadly Music', is sabotaged by a self-sapping irony.

The carnival doesn't end there. Die Trip Computer Die have several messages to vouchsafe unto the ears of the world, and their extremely peculiar lyrics convey a real circus sideshow atmosphere, making out that all human life is merely a cartoon-like pageant of insanity. 'Mr Basin' lolls out its lyrical lines which are kinda wacky in a low-grade surrealist way, yet remain oddly old-fashioned too - as though the writers haven't quite shaken off that Art-School sense of irony. This same spirit extends to the lavish, full colour picture book inside, generously allowing a full page of CD booklet artwork to illustrate the concept to each song. These mixtures of extreme colour contrasts, virulent collage and Photoshop tomfoolery manage to deliver precisely the same queasy

upset-stomach feel as the music.

Given the interest of Executive Producer Ed Baxter in promoting some of the more far-flung eccentrics of music (a future project on this label will be a rare live LP by the incomparable Revd Fred Lane), this may not come as a real surprise; its very naftness is almost confrontational. DTCDD are Xentos, who is allegedly the man behind L Voag and The Homosexuals; Lepke Buchwater, the London DJ who's named after a gangster movie; and Tony Barrow. This is a monstrous overblown record that falls about laughing at its own ingenious idiocy.

ED PINSENT

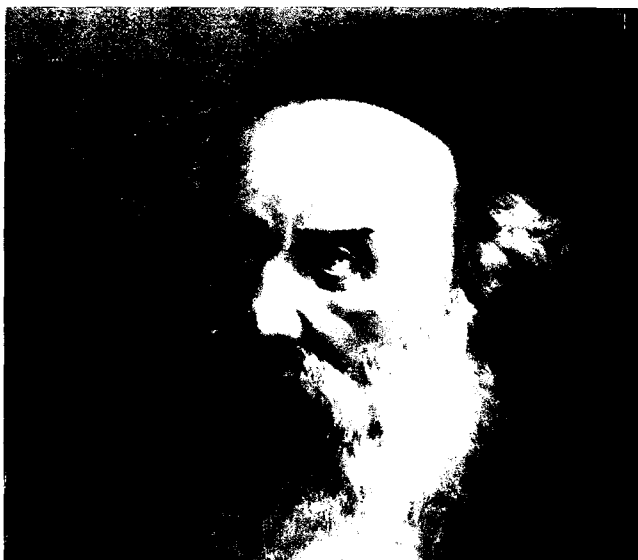
From PO Box 556, London SE5 0RL

Oren Ambarchi and Robbie Avenaim

The Alter Rebbe's Nigun

USA, TZADIK TZ 7131 (1999)

Starting off with some chiming guitars and very plangent dissonances, the music soon kicks into gear with some explosive thunderous heavy-metal noise, exhibiting the kind of deranged chaos you'd associate with a particularly apocalyptic Butthole Surfers live set. Instead, this music is intended to relay the substance of the holy teachings of one Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liad, known amongst his followers as the Alter Rebbe [High Rabbi]. Active in the 18th century, the holy man proposed a series of metaphysical / theological works, known as his *Nigunim*, and it is one of these, the most mystical and cosmic, that our two musicians are celebrating in sound. Just as any artist is interested in the processes of creation, so the Rebbe discerned a pattern behind the cosmic order of things, with Jehovah as the highest Creator of all. The four stages or levels in the creative process stemming from *tzimtzum* are Emanation, Creation, Formation and Action. The natural order of these stages, as interpreted in music and sound, are of course reversed on the CD in a conceit perhaps to suggest the left-to-right reading of a Hebrew text. Hence we end the CD with an



The Alter Rebbe's Nigun

this: the music throughout never fails to inspire the fear and awe of an Old Testament God, and the multitracked horns are fit for bringing down the walls of Jericho.

Part of John Zorn's 'Radical Jewish Culture' series, this CD was performed and recorded by two Australian members of the punk band Phlegm (one of whose CDs I have reviewed elsewhere). Orthodox Jews both, they are former students of the Talmud and Tanya. At the same time they bring together musical influences from 'the Japanese Noise Scene, traditional Jewish Nigunim and Yiddish theatre, Marc Ribot, Ornette Coleman and countless others...' You can see why Zorn would be interested, I guess. You should be too; I can virtually guarantee you won't have heard anything quite like this!

ED PINSENT

Various Artists

Savage Pencil presents... *The Antiquack: A Dead Duck Selection*

EMI RECORDS LTD SONGBOOK SERIES 7243 4 96606 2 5 (1999)

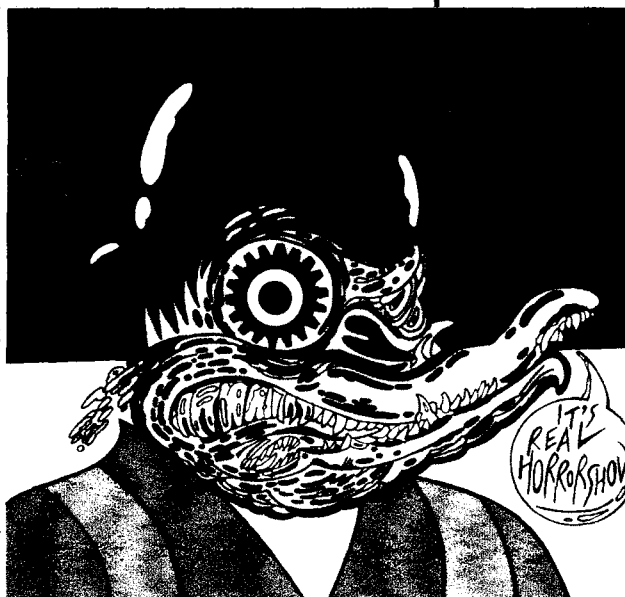
A vast improvement on his previous solo CD *Shivelization*, the strange yet rather cranky and impenetrable Ether Hogg record made in California, this new Savage Pencil presentation comes to us under the auspices of no less a magnate than EMI. It's part of a series of such works devoted to cartoonists and cult writers who were commissioned to choose their favourite music (or provide their own) within a luxury CD Book package with text and images of their choice...others in the series include Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton, Iain Banks, Peter Bagge and Hunter S Thompson. Savage Pencil has opted to use the format to tell a story of his own in sound and image.

Mr Pencil has selected an impeccable range of music here, including the extremes of Japanese Noise obscurity Seichi Yamamoto (from the Alchmey label) lying down alongside two fine tracks from Sun Ra. There's a sweet harmonic mourn from Brian Wilson and The Beach Boys, from *Surf's Up*; 1960s Blue Note jazz from Duke Ellington with Charles Mingus and Max Roach; along with favourite psychedelic guitar workouts, including Quicksilver Messenger Service and High Tide. The eccentrics of rock are represented by Faust, John Fahey, Royal Trux, Captain Beefheart; Viv Stanshall turning in 'The Question' from a very rare B-side; and Neil Innes playing his funereal organ and piano mini-elegy 'Slush' from the final Bonzos LP. One of the greatest ever bowing-out tracks to end a band's career - the poignant sadness of the melody undercut by a laugh-box track, summing up the best of The Bonzos' achievement, with the revelation that everything was a joke, even the death of a band.

instructional, doctrinal initiation: a lengthy reading (in Hebrew) of selected holy texts, performed by Rabbi Yankel Lieder. The inclusion of this reading, performed over some sinister backwards tapes and frankly eerie echoed percussion, is a master stroke. You may think this esoteric, religious material, set forth in a language that few listeners will understand and steeped in a culture alien to us *goyim*, means it's something of a closed shop, but you shouldn't miss

The musical component also boasts a guitar and feedback solo by Savage Pencil himself, a wild and feral noisy burst that demonstrates the raw strength of his completely untutored guitar style. One of Pencil's childhood stories is the tale of his woeful guitar lessons from an old square trying to teach him 'Little Brown Jug' when he really wanted to play Blue Öyster Cult solos. But this is only one part of the story. Interspersed through the fine music is a bizarre narrative, featuring Sav's anti-hero Dead Duck, one of his most objectionable comic strip characters who keeps resurfacing no matter how many times he's killed off. Given a voice here by blues singer and conga player Robin Brown, the Duck reincarnates himself as a series of sordid low-lives, most memorably as Jim Morrison, reprising the infamous 'flashing' incident while appearing on a spoof version of *Stars In Their Eyes*. No aspect of modern life is spared from the vicious satire of Savage Pencil, and he wallows in the excesses of sleazy sexual practices (videos, fetishes, dominatrix prostitutes), allowing the Duck to acquire a massive erection through Viagra, and indulge in nihilistic wish-fulfillment fantasies where he shoots total strangers for wearing the wrong kind of trendy high street gear. The gun and penis 'motifs' are rendered with just the sort of lipsmacking savour you've come to expect from this artist.

The story is brought to 3-D Technicolour life in a gallery of mind-searing drawings reproduced in full colour as a booklet stapled into the package. (If this had been released in the 1970s, just think what a lavish double LP with book it might have made!) Here, Sav X lets rip with his familiar blood and guts outrages of sickness, but undercutting it all are yet more subversive ideas expressed as images. A favourite trick of his has been to exploit well-known icons of modern culture and re-think them on his own terms, to express his sick ideas in a format everyone will 'get' instantly; hence we have the cover, a reworking of the famous Jim Morrison image used on the *No-One Here Gets Out Alive* bio; and inside, the David Pelham *Clockwork Orange* paperback cover from 1971 is remade into a visual pun featuring the Duck character. These invert the cliché of the famous image, and once they get under your skin there's no shifting them...less immediately obvious is the clever Dr Seuss homage, used to picture Viv Stanshall as a catfish.



Stylistically Sav's drawing style has now evolved to the point where's it's an unholy cross between the art of Austin Osman Spare and Rick Griffin - occultism and psychedelic weirdness in equal amounts, and with the razor-sharp precision of both those draughtsmen. Colours are dropped in by computer (with the help of Princess LeisureCentre), and, further exploiting modern technology, visual samples are made - including a close-up photograph of a cooked duck's roasted skin from a cookery book. Hideous beyond belief, yet you can't stop looking at the stuff.

The Sound Projector 6ixth issue 1999

An endorsement of utter freakdom and out-there alienated scuzziness mingled with contempt for the ineptitudes of the sad human race, celebrated through frazzled imagery and hand-picked morsels of the best music ever recorded by mankind...this is such a coherent tour de force and powerful artistic statement, how can you live without it? Yet it's too strange for mass consumption. I understand this unique artefact is being virtually ignored and gathering dust on many a shelf as we speak. I predict that in the near future the scales will fall from everyone's eyes and it will be seen as the major statement it truly is, so you'd better do everything in your power to snag a copy now, or be forever doomed to scour the lists of record collector magazines.

ED PINSENT

Sun City Girls

Midnight Cowboys from Ipanema

USA, AMARILLO RECORDS ACM-587 (ND)

Allegedly one of the more accessible releases from this strange Californian Underground band. Here they perform their twisted cover versions of well-known hit songs, among them 'Radar Love' by Golden Earring, 'Brandy', and soul classics 'Love Train' and 'Me and Mrs Jones'. It takes a deal of chutzpah to pull off such jiggery-pokery successfully, and you can imagine a lesser band would be cracking up every few seconds as they fall about laughing at their own waggishness. But Sun City Girls are above this; truly committed to the life of freakdom, they care not a tinker's cuss for our conventional sensibilities and relish the opportunity to take the mick out of everything with free use of obscenity and sardonic humour in equal gobbets. This strategy is manifested here by the priceless snippets of babbling and tape-malarkey between the songs - insane sleazy backchat dialogues between the group, each episode swiftly collapsing into louche and puerile filthiness (often coincident with a mischievous hand on the vari-speed knob). A trick reminiscent, of course, of the early Mothers Of Invention records, which in turn were sending up the 1960s penchant for pop musicians (including The Beach Boys and The Monkees) to include their own inane studio banter on their releases.

The music here is pretty darn fine actually, with the result that the songs stand up in spite of themselves as great entertainment (to these ears, at any rate). The vocals are the weirdest bit, each singer doing their best to strain at those high notes they know they can't reach, parody the clichéd squawkings of well-known soul singers, and - in the case of 'Tell Me Something Good' - deliver an all-out hysterical distortion attack worthy of The Residents. These are supported ably by a rhythm section and a fluid lead guitar that injects as much heavy metal styled send-ups as seem (in)appropriate to the piece. Each performance is so casually loose that they could be seasoned bar-room hacks playing their stale old repertoire for the thousandth time, yet the record comes up fresh as a daisy.

This CD, a reissue of a 1986 cassette from the Girls, is undoubtedly but one of the many manifestations of this bizarre band who are long favoured amongst connoisseurs of the twisted. This just might account for why their original vinyl issues are a bit scarce just now.

Amarillo Records, PO Box 2443, San Francisco, California 94124, USA.

ED PINSENT

Sun City Girls

Box Of Chameleons

3 X CD Box Set

ABDUCTION RECORDS ABTD009

3 CDs, 128 tracks and nearly 4 hours of music, though 'music' may not be a term that some would apply to this exhaustive collection of what is only a small part of the entire Sun City Girls back catalogue (over 60 releases counting vinyl, CD and cassette). Little is known about SCG except that they are not girls and, judging by some of the dates in the track listing, they've been playing together since 1971.

The insert booklet states that 'this CD set was recorded in Hi-Fi/Lo-Fi/No-Fi and fidelity you won't achieve ever! - in real time.' And they mean it.

Drumming on upturned oilcans, drunks playing saxophone, dogs howling in a subway underpass and the penny whistle fumbings of the homeless and desperate - and this is all in the first 5 tracks! Throw in some inept Can-style 'ethnic' twaddle, what sounds like Pavement during a soundcheck and a sniggeringly narrated tale of hillbillies poisoned by bad water and some people would have solid grounds to rip the thing out of the CD player and use it as a fine coaster. But that would be to give in to what I believe is SCG's *raison d'être*: with their scrapbook cutouts of Asian catalogue models and crossword puzzles as album 'artwork' and their 'odd' song titles ('Asian Women on the Telephone', 'Cuts on Phantom Limbo', 'BOBBY SANDS' and 'Lubricated Forays') they have set out to be as deliberately annoying as they can be in their own little way. The whole point of this relentless wave of 2-minute tracks by 3 men who are clearly not taxed by their day jobs is to stir the listener into a state of indefinable frustration. As they veer from 30 second 'free jazz' thrash sessions to Hare Krishna street chants it seems the only way to sort out your emotions is to head for the nearest pub and pick and argument with a stranger.

Having said that, persistent listening proves SCG to be worthy. They are following their own path and staying true to their instincts, however askew they may be. There's a pointlessness to many of their tracks that makes you wonder why they even bothered? And then you begin

to wonder if such wilful perversity is intentional, if idiotic lyrics mumbled in a bored monotone while a man with broken fingers tinkers with a piano is intended as some kind of 'comment' on the pointlessness of all consumer music. And then you realise that SCG probably don't care.

Meanwhile, back in the pub, you're screaming. 'IT'S ART VS. CULTURE!' while John Smith tries to ignore you and orders another pint.

And SCG are not on the jukebox.

RIK RAWLING

Sun City Girls

Live In The Land Of The Rising

JAPAN OVERSEAS JO97 - 30

Japan gave the Western World Merzbow, Masonna and Shonen Knife and we responded with Sun City Girls. As cultural exchanges go it's a fair swap I reckon.

Allegedly recorded in Kyoto, Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya during 1994 all the tracks sound suspiciously like the band were performing in a crowded cupboard for the benefit of a select audience of teenage girls who like nothing better than seeing 3 guys hammering away at their instruments like cavemen. In the live arena, with no studio tricks and samples to back them up the SCG are left to fend for themselves with nothing more than a drumkit, bass, guitar and piano. Consequently most of the tracks sound exactly the same - drunken monkey drumming, Les Dawson piano tinkling and lots of high end of the fretboard guitar twiddling that after about the 4th track becomes as annoying to the senses as a child repeatedly kicking a ball against a wall because he's got nothing better to do.

Once again SCG are doing this shit for their own amusement and once you make that dawning realisation you can join them in the fun and the frolics. Eventually it's the lack of range that makes this collection so enjoyable - the guitar screech becomes fingernails drawn down a blackboard repeatedly and, like Masonna, it becomes an exhilarating test of endurance for the listener - the sonic equivalent of Richard Harris in *A Man Called Horse*, strung from the rafters with eagle claws through his nipples.

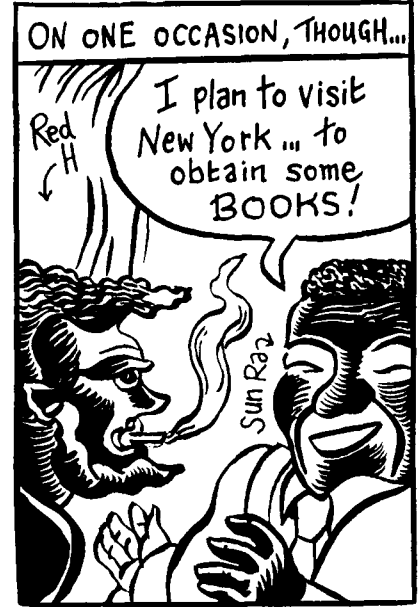
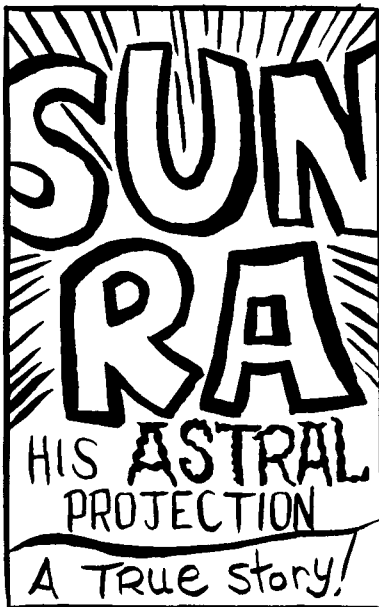
Essentially this is free jazz riffing taken to the *nth* degree with some Yamantaka Eye screams and grunts thrown in and by the end of the last track the audience cries out in what sounds like a mixture of pleasure and relief. Track titles like 'Night of Spilled Brains', 'Atomic Jackal' and 'Maggot Dripping Mouth' seem unnecessary as it's obvious that SCG will never be able to repeat this unstructured racket in the same manner again. And, as usual, they probably don't care.

If SCG were gallery artists they'd be doing installations of dog carcasses and turning up at shows drunk, abusing the guests and saying that was all part of their art too. And they would still get away with it.

RIK RAWLING

Contact : Japan Overseas, 6-1-21 Ueshio, Tennoji-Ku, Osaka 543, Japan

e-mail : shoel@atgol.com



Story from Valerie Wilmer, 'As Serious as your Life' ALLISON & BUSBY, 1977
pictures - see booklet to EVIDENCE ECD22164.

Drawn by Ed Pinsent 1999

FREE JAZZ

Sunny Murray with Sabir Mateen

We Are Not At The Opera

USA, EREMITA MTE014 (1999)

The title, I suppose, is to encourage the prospective listener to let down their hair and enjoy this music for what it is - ie we're not in church (don't revere it), this isn't establishment music (we ain't squares), in short *We Are Not At The Opera*. Because in a way the presenters and promoters behind it are aware that they might be a shade too respectful themselves. 'Avatar of Free jazz drums Sunny Murray', boasts the poster for this event, recorded June 1998 at the Amherst Unitarian Meeting House in Massachusetts. 'All the way from Paris', where Murray now lives - somewhat ironic, in that many of the most significant proponents of this unique Afro-American music have not found a home in their own country. The life of almost every jazz player has been a struggle with racism, finding work, and dealing with the vicissitudes of playing in lousy venues for small beer, in front of an indifferent audience.

The Eremita label and its associates are among many young people trying to repatriate the avant-garde jazz sensibility, redeeming it - and over-compensating for the sins of our forefathers perhaps in the process. With this CD we have the exceptional pioneer of avant-garde jazz drumming, James Marcellus Arthur 'Sunny' Murray, now over 60 and playing an exceptionally fine set supported ably by the younger reedsman and flautist, Sabir Mateen. Murray's work used to be much heavier on the cymbals, washing everything in a sea of clattering silver clouds, where now he tends to concentrate more on the snare and rimshot work. It's focused and minimal, and without perhaps the wildness of his 1960s work, but still with primed with a grandeur, and suffused energy.

Murray was one of the few drummers who fitted right in with the demands of the Cecil Taylor Unit in the early 1960s, and was among Taylor's personal favourites. He went to Europe in 1963 and played live there with Taylor and Jimmy Lyons; the recordings in Holland at the Café Montmartre are recommended listening. Under Taylor's influence Murray helped redefine and liberate jazz drumming - along with other radicals of the instrument, such as Rashied Ali and Milford Graves. They moved away from the pulsebeat, eventually disposing with it altogether. Murray chose instead to lay down a constant barrage of cymbal clouds and snare work, with no traditional timekeeping at all. He responded to what the other musicians were doing, and interacted with their solos; or he simply made a beautiful percussive noise and contributed this to the ensemble playing.

In Europe he met up with Albert Ayler, and formed (with Gary Peacock) the well-known trio that recorded *Spiritual Unity* for ESP-Disk. If you don't have this record yet, you should do. Murray lived in France for some time, long enough to participate in the

Pan-African Festival at Algiers in 1968, and record a magnificent LP for the French Shandar label with a bunch of French jazz musicians. Called simply *Sunny Murray* (Shandar SR 10 008) it's a bit of rarity these days.

I always think it's interesting that the 18th century British Government banned the drum outright in its American and West Indian colonies. This was because they feared it would be used to incite revolt and riots, undermine their authority.

Amongst displaced Africans in those communities, the drum thus became a powerful symbol of their African identity, and the simple act of playing it would return them to their roots in a second. This is one of the strongest and deepest primal forces that have given the drum its place in free jazz - something expressed most clearly in the music of Sunny Murray.

ED PINSENT

Raphe Malik

Consequences

USA, EREMITA MTE013 (1999)

Excellent new CD from trumpeter Malik, possibly an improvement on his previous *The Short Form*. This features six of his compositions, recorded live at the Fire in the Valley jazz festival in Massachusetts, July 1997. He's joined by some first-rate sidemen - including the late Denis Charles on drums, William Parker on bass, plus Sabir Mateen on the alto.

There's a lot more space in the pieces, some very sparse dynamics, where everything stops dead only to rekindle itself just as suddenly, and long tracts allowing lengthy bass solos and drum solos. On the alto, Mateen is very reminiscent of Eric Dolphy, while Malik comes over like a cross between Louis Armstrong (one of his heroes) and Donald Ayler, when he shifts a gear and takes off into detailed passages of mad, buzzing clustered notes. In the brief spaces Malik allows himself to blow, he says an awful lot.

There is a real precision in his playing, which points to his commitment to a structured form of free jazz. He's a composer as much as a player, and says that 'playing music is very much similar to building a house a piece of furniture'. Confirming this, Ed Hazell states in his sleeve notes that Malik plays 'with a variety of architectures...his tunes are blueprints for liberation'. Over his career in the world of free jazz Malik must have heard enough young men screaming into their saxs, all blowing loudly at the same time, in the name of freedom; but if they're all playing in the same key, it becomes monotonous. His friend Jimmy Lyons (sax player with the Cecil Taylor Unit) far from being a screamer, could play in ten keys in the course

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The Sound Projector 6ixth issue 1999

of a single solo, and modulate all the time. I think maybe some listeners have come to free jazz expecting some arty form of punk rock - fair enough, but think again, kiddos.

Malik had just left high school in the mid 1960s, when free jazz was in the ascendant; he could see the clear connection between the music of Coltrane and Miles, and the political scene - the civil rights movement, anti-war demonstrations. He saw Miles play live a lot, and this helped him figure out the music of the more extreme free jazzers - Archie Shepp, Sun Ra, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Men of these ilk were playing 'anthems of the revolution', as Malik puts it; it's no coincidence that Ra and the Art Ensemble were asked to play at Ann Arbor jazz festivals by the White Panther activist, John Sinclair.

Malik has been a player with Cecil Taylor for some 20 years, most notably performing on the epic set *One Too Many Salty Swift and Not Goodbye* - released as a 3LP

box set by the Hat Hut label in 1980. Malik came to New York in 1973, where Taylor was in the midst of running an academic programme; he was teaching a course called 'The Black Aesthetic', besides enabling workshops for musicians. Malik also learned from the lectures of Jimmy Lyons and Andrew Cyrille, who made him aware of the 300-year presence of black music in the USA. Although Taylor's performances didn't always sit well with the students (not all of them could stand his supercharged, marathon-performance avant garde music sessions), the institutionalisation of jazz in America seems to have taken off; because Malik now himself has a chair on the faculty of Bennington College. It's one of the few universities that actively sponsors the avant-garde, and he's being paid to write, compose and play.

Malik's story is an inspiring one - and so is his music, as shown on this fine set from one of the survivors of free jazz.

ED PINSENT

A lot of the above is cribbed from Opprobrium magazine #4, where Malik was interviewed by journalist Ed Hazell.

'Dekoboko Hajime' (John Zorn) & Yamantaka Eye

Nani Nani

USA, TZADIK TZ7206 (1995)

'Ambient screams. Hardcore surf, erotic Indian psychedelia, Moronic samples, Industrial Monster Movies, Karaoke Vomit and so much more'. That's what the cover blurb says. I was intrigued to say the least but what you actually get is a lot of self-indulgent, uninspired nonsense. Zorn plays duck calls while Eye screams, plays the kazoo or children's learning toys and then blows bubbles underwater. You get samples of pigs squealing and helicopters and TV background noise. Eye backpedals on the screams a bit and takes to jabbering like an irate Japanese housewife. Track after track it's all virtually the same. Where the fuck is the Karaoke Vomit??

To be fair it's not ALL the same. 'Yoga Dollar' is an Alan Lamb style drone piece, 'Propolution' sounds like the theme to *The Terminator* and 'My Rainbow Life' is lounge piano with Eye doing pub singer oriental-style - all of which reads better than it actually sounds. And just when you think they've gone and disappointed you all they could they then go and waste the best title, 'Bad Hawkwind', on an 18 minute drone made up from a continuous loop of Eye's trademark lunghowls. The whole sorry venture ends with a toilet flush.

I really wanted to like this. It throbbed with potential but once inside the CD player it went limp and complained that it must be tired or something. I expected it to be so much crazier, so much more inventive, but it just seems that they weren't particularly interested. Perhaps the intention was to underwhelm the avid Zornothologists out there who'd be foolish enough to stump up £15 for this and if that's the case then they succeeded. Sun City

Girls do this SO much better and, unlike Zorn & Eye, don't have other projects to fall back on to 'prove' their 'artistic merit'. They are DEADLY SERIOUS about their stupidity while Zorn & Eye were simply stood in the studio lighting farts.

RIK RAWLING



John Zorn Music For Children (Music Romance Volume 1) USA, TZADIK TZ7321 (1998)

Even the most dedicated of Zornothologists must be saying by now, 'Enough already!' Seemingly every month sees another release and, unlike the equally prolific Merzbow, I've begun to notice an adherence to the law of diminishing returns. It seems like the man is running out of things to say and his 'notoriously' eclectic approach to

composition looks more and more like a man desperately running around trying to look for something to cling to.

And it's not that I don't like the man's work. The Naked City albums - particularly *Torture Garden* and *Leng T'Che* are long term favourites at my house. But he's done some abysmal twaddle as well and gets away with it because of his 'avant garde' pedigree. This collection of Zorn compositions (only 2 tracks of which Zorn himself plays on) veers wildly from spooky kids TV theme tunes to 'poly - rhythmix etudes' to Naked City-era thrash jazz to 20+ minutes of Zorn on 3 wind machines playing a track dedicated to Edgard Varese that makes Alan Lamb sound like Wham! Once again, Zorn sees a musical 'genre' and appropriates it by hammering it into the ground with a completely OTT approach that lacks all the grace and mystery that Lamb brings to his 'Wire music'. The only real standout track is 'Dreamer of Dreams' performed primarily by Marc Ribot on guitar - a haunting romanticisation of the America that lies somewhere between the trailer park and the Marlboro poster.

This is probably just a nonsense mix of forgotten tracks and to justify the title and alleged childhood themes in the music Ikue Mori has assembled an excellent collection of photographs and artwork to establish a strong enough mood to seep into the music itself. Images ranging from 'Little Nemo' style watercolours to grainy photos of child's corpses and sinister dolls deliver the desired whiff of corruption and innocence lost but ultimately it's no more effective than some 6th form Goth art student gluing black lace to their paintings for 'authenticity'.

Perhaps sometimes people are better off with their Steps albums? At least it's real music for children.

RIK RAWLING

"Round Things Are Boring"

PROJECT D.A.R.K. ARE A TEAM OF ARTISTS, KIRSTEN REYNOLDS AND ASHLEY DAVIES, with visual assist from Tony Pattinson; they put hand-made, circular art objects on their turntables, and play them as if they were records. These can include found objects like circular saws, or sandpaper cut into disc shapes; or hand-made semi-sculptural objects, the most notorious being the large biscuits, the section of a tree trunk, panes of glass, and the hair records - locks of their own hair cut and glued on a disc. The objects are made to resemble records by having labels stuck in the centre; there the resemblance ends however, because they have no microgrooves and are not in any way efficient carriers of pre-recorded material. The labels extend the conceit by printing punning, non-existent song titles so that each artefact is a humorous self-referencing object.

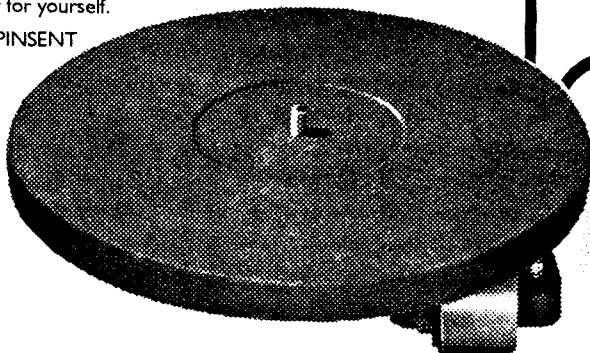
The business of putting them on turntables involves a parody of DJing, a confrontation between a stylus and a textured surface, which produces a species of noise which can be further manipulated by using effects pedals in a live situation. These live shows are by all accounts exciting and explosive - reports have reached us of fireworks and exploding turntables, which have shocked audiences around the world. I had hoped to see one of these live shows in May 1999, a rooftop gig at the Queen Elizabeth Hall supporting Otomo Yoshihide, but it was cancelled. Nor have I actually heard the music, unfortunately; no sample tapes or CDs were provided to *The Sound Projector*; bar a promotional video with short sound excerpts. This, I was informed, was 'not put together as a totally representative piece of work'. I can't pass final judgement on the music, therefore - though the concept is entertaining enough.

As far as I can understand it, the idea started as a conceptual art piece - but executed with a great sense of fun. Kirsten Reynolds and other band members of Headbutt had a brilliant drunken idea one night. Unlike some who fall at the first post at the bleak light of day, they went further and started to create a Conceptual Series. A catalogue of records made out of unusual materials began to emerge. 'Round things are boring', said Frank Zappa on his 1967 *Lumpy Gravy* meisterwerk. Not to these guys.

We should point out that these were at first only intended as art objects - they would exist in limited editions of about 20 or 25, would have jokey labels stuck to them, and lent themselves to being exhibited in wooden cases, making a mockery of kitschy gold records proudly displayed in the offices of some rich record executive. Then they had the idea to actually play the darn things on a turntable, and Project D.A.R.K. was started on the road to success. I don't think anyone involved would pretend that it's 100% new - after all it's a fairly well-known fact the Aphex Twin played sandpaper on his turntables in a New York gig, and there was allegedly a remote Dutch record label that issued records pressed in the surface of cakes.

No, the problem is, to these ears at least, the music itself is not really very interesting. All I can hear (on the short video tape at least, as mentioned above) is a series of indifferent, grinding sludgy electronic noises, the only variations arising from the effects pedals applied to the source. The sounds produced by these foreign materials are essentially inert; no amount of tone-arm manipulation, added effects pedals, or video backdrops can do anything to escape this inertness. This is not surprising, as the materials chosen simply have no acoustic properties to speak of in the first place. We're almost literally being asked to 'hear' things that don't really have any inherent sound. I think it's an experiment that doesn't really work, and fails to prove anything one way or the other. Still, don't take my word for it - get hold of some of their records and hear for yourself.

ED PINSENT



From an Interview with Kirsten Reynolds (KR) at 2 April 1999, at The Plough, Museum Street.

THE RECORDS - THEIR MATERIALS AND SONIC PROPERTIES

KR These things provide source sounds. In the way that anything does. And because of current technology, it is now possible to do a lot more mutating of those sounds. And constructing - and sequencing. Because of the approach that we take, the sounds that come out of the other end of that system, will be quite...different. At the beginning I was thinking...I'll stick that on the turntable and see what happens. So we tried it. They all make different sounds, naturally, and it's just to do with the way a stylus works. But it became apparent there was a lot of extraneous noise going on, and though each one was making a specific sound there'd be this extra bit. So we sent the signal out through loads of EQ and some very basic cheap guitar effects. Which just meant you could control what was happening, if it was making a good sound, you could filter that out. Select it, and enhance it. Not really change it, but just pick out the sound which is unique to that surface.

EP *So there's something inherently unusual about the sounds?*

KR I've never heard anything like them! You're talking about an area of music that's not this, that or the other. You're narrowing it down. It's not made by violins, it's not played by guitars. Someone could listen to that and go, oh

Project D.A.R.K.





you could have made it with a synthesiser. However - it has been made in none of those ways. And no-one else is making things in quite that way. So - it's a kind of detail, but it is still very very different. I say that, although people off the street may say - no difference whatsoever. Depending on your degree of ear-experience, or whatever you want to call it. There has to be an actual physical difference in the sound, because of the way it's made. I think aspects of it haven't been heard before.

EP *To begin with, it wasn't intended that they'd be played at all?*

KR We intended to play them, purely as a conceptual thing. They should be played, but [making a record] would have been as a document of them - whereas what's actually happened is it's turned into more of an instrument for making music, as opposed to a record as a record.

EP *The substances aren't chosen for their sonic properties at all, are they?*

KR They're chosen mainly visually, I'd say. However, there are certain things you can look at the material there and you can imagine, with your common sense and other experience - what this bit's gonna sound like. So you think - let's use that, because not only does it look great but you know it's gonna sound different. Really spectacularly different to the others. That's happened many times. Like with the sandpaper ones, there's all different kinds of sandpaper. We played on the international aspect, the fact that they're all from different countries - you'll find one that's far more granular. So you know that will sound different and be useful in other ways.

When I say whack the stylus on, it's actually played quite percussively. It's not grooves, you're constantly doing things with it at that end...it's not just a drone of noise, the [tonearm] can be used as an instrument. As a drumstick. Except when

you hit you get a different sound. It's like triggering a sample or something.

EP *What determines the choice of materials?*

KR Most of these are just things we've come across in daily life. If you find yourself in a hardware shop you end up buying a circular saw. We're always trying to fix things and mend things, so we're in certain environments all the time. They are just the things that easily come to hand. We've got a list of things we would do if we had the money, or the manufacturing capabilities. These have all got to be things we can come across easily, or make ourselves. But that's just the way of the process. And I also think it should be something that's familiar to most people. That wasn't an intentional thing, but I think it's quite important that is the case. It makes sense...it's not like 'What's That???' It's more like, 'Oh, that's a biscuit that looks like a record.' That's either interesting or humorous depending on how you take it.

Recently we've been doing some stuff with gramophone players. Rather than being a stylus electronic signal, it is a purely acoustic signal that's generating it. So in order to do anything with it live, you've got to either have gigantic horn so everyone can hear it, or it becomes electronic at some point because it gets recorded or hooked up to a mic or whatever.



LIVE SHOWS - SPECTACLES AND LIGHT

KR The very first thing we did was an exhibition at the Metro on Rupert Street. [The equipment] was really basic. Just jumble sale things. And that went through three guitar pedals and that was it. As soon as we had played these and recorded those sounds, we just multi-tracked them on a four track at home and made some singles. So there would be vinyl in the series, but the vinyl in the series has been made from the sounds of the objects. If that makes sense! We'd just make a bit of a mix, so that you've got something that's controllable, I mean that involves a delay or a loop so there's some kind of coherence, although it's not constructed as music as such. So that's on vinyl - so then the vinyl can be played alongside the thing. That could be the bass and drums of the band and this becomes the guitar solo. A ridiculous thing to say, because it sounds nothing like that whatsoever! There's something that's constant and you know what it's gonna be, and you have the live thing over the top.

We did that in loads of different places, in Europe, in funny old bars and any old place that would have us. In fact we supported Headbutt, though we were Headbutt as well. It was an easy way of playing twice! And then we got asked to do Brussels, and it was a huge great old cinema, and we were gonna be on a stage for the first time, because before we'd just been in rooms on a tabletop. You could see what was happening on the deck, and suddenly I just thought - 'If we're gonna be on stage, nobody's gonna be able to see these records and we're gonna be making funny noises, and no-one's gonna know why.' Tony had been filming us in a documentary fashion up until then. He said why don't we use my VHS camera to provide a live monitor of what's happening. So we had a big camera on stage looking at the deck and that image was then sent to this screen so you could see what was happening. And then seeing that we thought, 'That looks fantastic! We've gotta do that again.' But the problem was we had this giant camera which just looked ridiculous. So because [Tony] had been doing some work with surveillance cameras, for various secret filming - we bought a little miniature spy camera, which we then attached to the stylus arm. So we had this camera that would be mounted on the arm, and a second little camera on a goose-neck that was bent over it. So - two images of the same deck, and you could just switch between the two, just to make it look a bit more lively. The spy camera is a pinhole camera, so everything's in focus and it's quite wide angle. Subsequent to that we've got the second camera on a miniature robot arm now, so it kind of moves around.

EP *So right from the start it's a visual thing, isn't it? Seems to be more a visual percentage to it than sound.*

KR I wouldn't say it's bigger. The whole point of it is that any sound that is made comes from something that also has, by its nature, a visual content. And even if you choose something for its sonic properties, it's still gonna look like something! That's unavoidable. I think that because there's a logic to what's going on, people want to see it. And I also personally have a hatred of bands where you're in a room and there's nothing to look at. Because I just think that's a sense ignored. And it happens so many times. I've seen enough blokes in black T shirts at gigs and I don't wanna see any more! Not to say that people should be dressed up in visual suits and flouncing around for the sake of it, because that wouldn't make any sense either. It's got to be appropriate to what's going on. I'm also really bored of Club visuals, which are a load of old 1950s super-eight films, overlaid with a slide of a circuit diagram. Which is everywhere. It's the same everywhere. Because you see them so often they just become redundant. It's just a wallpaper situation. I'm not saying [what we do] is the solution for everything, but for us it's relevant and I think it looks fantastic.

EP *With your performances, has anyone ever been outraged, or shocked, or dismayed, or disappointed? Is it intended to be provocative?*

KR The thing that causes most problems is, we do have this explosive ending...! Which came about because I had a record player that didn't go around, because it was too cheap and crap! And I found out that even if it's not plugged in, there's no power going through it, you still get a sound coming from the stylus through the line-out of the phonos in the back. Never knew that before, it's just something that I came across. And then I discovered...because we're playing things that aren't vinyl, it doesn't matter what speed it goes around, it doesn't have to be precisely pitched or anything. And then because of my Bow Gamelan background, I had a pile of fireworks under my bed! And I thought - I'm sure if I put a rocket on this record, as a kind of driving mechanism, it would go round. And I became a bit fascinated by this idea. And thought I'd try it. It looks fantastic! It whizzes round and makes a big light thing and the lid flies off. Because it's a proper firework it causes an immense amount of problems in public situations, because it's against every regulation in the book.

I don't want to cause difficulties, but I also want to do what our show entails. If it entails that and people don't want us to do it, then I've gotta find a way round it. Most people are quite reasonable - I can show them our safety devices, and show that I know what I'm doing, and it's usually OK and they switch off their smoke detectors for that part of the show. Sometimes you're in a situation where everyone's being so arsey you just know that if you ask, they're gonna say no. We did this in Liverpool. And I hadn't actually discussed this with the technicians or the organiser, but he'd seen all our press beforehand, so he knew what we were gonna do. He chose to put us third out of four things in the night. Which I thought it was slightly odd, because it's a difficult thing to follow when everything's just blown up! However, I didn't want to question his...curatorial judgement. That was his professional decision...we blew up and finished and left the stage, and the next act came on and did his thing, and about four minutes into it the fire alarms went off and the building got evacuated. And it wasn't intentional at all!

EP *Is loud volume a part of your performance - does it have to be loud to succeed?*

KR No - I think it has to be a certain level, otherwise it just sounds pathetic. It's not convincing. But it's not a real painful volume thing, it doesn't need to be because a lot of the sounds are quite extreme, in their frequency specificity, or their weird shape. So, rather than the volume, that's the kind of thing that's more difficult for people, if they're gonna find it difficult. There's not a lot of smoothing-out processing, some of it is quite straight, and it's quite abrasive. Not all of it is, but parts of it are.

THE RECORDS IN AN ART GALLERY CONTEXT

EP *You took some of these items into Rough Trade shop, didn't you? Made an edition and see if anyone would buy them?*

KR Yeah, we tried to sell them, but nobody wanted them obviously. We did one of the vinyl ones...it's a vinyl picture disc, and the A-side is a sandpaper picture disc, and it's got a recording of the sandpaper on the A-side. And the B-side is like the back of the sandpaper, and has a remix. Nick from Transglobal got involved with that. It's sort an ongoing series - although there's only been one so far. Some people have said 'I wish I could play it on my turntable, but I don't want to.' So this is a way you can take it home, it would look pretty much like the actual thing would look, and you could play it, and it would make these really straight sounds, not messed around with in any way. And then the B-side would be the second generation version of those sounds, so it would be remixed or added to, or made into something...a constructed musical thing. They are for sale, and the editions are real. They are limited. Because they're just kind of special things, to define that area - there's that many of it and that's it. People say they could make their own - but that's not the point.

EP *What about exhibiting the records as artefacts?*

KR We did the thing in Intoxica...and we've done quite a few actually, one in Manchester and one in London...and we did one at the Zodiac in Oxford, which is how we got involved with the Peel thing, Sounds of the Suburbs. Funnily enough Ashley and Tony are both from Oxford so that's how we managed to get our name on the programme, although we're not really an Oxford band at all.



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AVAILABLE PRODUCTS

KR We've done quite a few bits and pieces on funny little labels. There's a label in the Basque region - French side - there's some very bizarre folk music in that area. They're far more bizarre than we could ever hope to be! We started doing this series called *Excited By Gramophones*, which is what the live show's called at the moment. The first one was on a German label and it's a limited edition, blue vinyl, 12 inch album. Volume two was a tape. Volume four was this one we did on Invisible Records, which is only a CD, to my immense disappointment. They couldn't afford to do vinyl as well. Out of choice I'd prefer the end product to come out on vinyl. For sonic reasons, visual reasons, collectible reasons...mainly because I want to use it on my turntable! Once it's on CD I can't do anything with it, it's like putting a full stop on the end of it. With vinyl I can re-use it, do something more with it.

EP *Are you satisfied with the results of these releases?*

KR Not particularly. They've been a compromise every time. For 'real world' reasons...they say can you do this album and we'll give you some money, and then you don't get it. There have been times when we've intentionally compromised, because I'd rather do something than nothing. It means we end up collaborating with other people far more than I would want to do, than something that's in my name. It would be nice to take control and do things exactly how we want to do them.

Some Artefacts from the INTOXICA Gallery list

- ⊙ *Pain / View*, SIN 001. Etched glass 7" artefact, framed, edition of 15.
- ⊙ *Dub Colossus meets D.A.R.K., Sand And Deliver / I'm Still Sanding*, SIN 0055. Audible glasspaper / sanded and polished 7", edition of 60.
- ⊙ *Forlorn Tennis Association EP*, SINN0066. Clear vinyl 7", edition of 40.
- ⊙ *Blindspots / You make me feel*, SIN0057. Braille 7", edition of 10.
- ⊙ *It's Dark at Night EP*, Outsider Records. 7"

**Project D.A.R.K.: PO Box 2879,
London N7 6DF**



LUCAS ABELA

The Man who put the N-O-I-S-E in N-S-W!

IF YOU WERE PAYING ATTENTION LAST ISSUE - AND I KNOW some of you were - you may have gleaned and glommed a brief introduction to the world of Lucas Abela, in our brief review of his solo CD Peeled Hearts Paste, and two CD releases on his independent Dual Plover label which he runs out of Sydney Australia. (Some others on this label are also reviewed this issue, so look for 'em!) Lucas touched down in London on 2 June 1999, where your Sound Projector team caught him playing a lively five-minute set at Backspace, an odd little 'bring your own' venue on Clink Street near London Bridge. Here, Lucas inserted an odd-looking instrument into his mouth and generated a series of highly bizarre, non-musical bursts of electric noise - looking not unlike some sort of twisted dental student practising on himself. We then escorted him - Abela walking barefoot, wearing some incredible flared trousers - to a nearby inn where we could sit outside and converse, thereby garnering some interesting facts and opinions re the fringes of the late 20th-century music underground scene as Abela sees it from his angle. No quarter given nor asked!

Notes: The 'Bridge' he refers to is a large steel curved frame, on which are mounted motors and discs spinning at high speeds. The 'Glove' is a handpiece fitted with four long styluses which enable him to sample records in a unique way...we saw neither of these, however, being treated only to what he calls the 'mouth-work'.

Sound Projector team = EP (Ed Pinsent) and WA (War Arrow)

LA = Lucas Abela



EP We've just seen Lucas Abela, playing at this venue called Backspace, which is like a cybernet cafe...weird...what on earth were you doing? It looked absolutely horrible and painful! You were sticking something in your mouth and you had like a utility belt of effects pedals around your waist.

LA I stick like a turkey skewer connected to a phonographic cartridge from a turntable in my mouth, and play that. It's a kitchen utensil designed for sewing up really big turkeys! I use it instead of a stylus. Apparently it has caused some damage to my mouth...everyone says it's bruised. I used to get damaged on the inside of my mouth...the inside of my cheek is torn apart every time I play a show and I have to leave a couple of shows before it repairs before I can play again without intense pain. It isn't so bad today, but apparently I'm bruised. Don't know why! I usually get lost in the moment...I can't say I did just then. The volume was a problem for me and I usually get into a stream of consciousness level when I'm playing and forget everything around me and just play and enjoy that a lot. But tonight...the volume was so low. I didn't get into that level of playing I would usually get into. It wasn't a PA, more like a Hi-Fi stereo system. Wasn't the finest show I ever did. But everyone seemed to enjoy it and said good things.

EP Well, there's several sides to it. There's you performing - and there's the volume. Maybe the volume let you down, but it was still spirited, energetic - the movements were there. Is the loud volume important to you?

LA Well, you play and feel as an improviser. You're not playing a set piece of music. You don't know which string to use, you don't know what you're doing. The volume and presence in the room makes it a better show in the end, it's harder to play with a low volume. I could hear people talking while I was playing, and I've never had that before! Never in my life had a hushed conversation when I'm playing. And that really signifies a low-level fuckin' sound. *(He becomes a tad disjected)* That show was crap, as far as I'm concerned! It was hard to get people to put me on, at a decent venue, with a decent PA. No-one's interested. I've been in touch with Dylan from Prick Decay, and he organised five shows for me in the UK and it ended up

turning into two shows, when I got here. I was really pissed off about that. He got me Glasgow and he got me Leeds (the Termite Club). Everything else I had to arrange myself. There was a last-minute Newcastle show, and this show was last-minute. Newcastle was a rock gig, supporting some rock band doing their album launch. I don't even know how I got onto that! But a gig's a gig, and I'll play anywhere...anytime!

EP That's a good philosophy. And it looks like you travel light.

LA Yes, it all fits in a backpack. I used to play the 'Bridge' and all the big machinery and stuff, but when I went to tour Japan in 97, I couldn't take it along with me. So that's when I developed the skewer-in-the-mouth show, because it's light, and it travels well, I can get around on a self-financed tour. No-one's paying you millions of dollars to drag a huge cargo of equipment. You can get through Customs because you haven't got lots of things.

WA (Amused) I can just imagine trying to get through Customs with a turkey skewer...what's this for!!!!

LA In San Francisco, they thought my turkey skewers - or my humming bars, as I call them - were instruments to break into cars! So they held me in Customs, put me in this back room, and had the San Francisco Police Department come and inspect all this equipment. They drilled me for a couple of hours about what I was doing. I ended up having to show them what I do - they were really confused, but they ended up letting me go. I call it a humming bar because I play the vibration of my lips against the bar - hence, humming bar. *(Imitates sound of this).*

EP Are you more of a performance artist, than an improviser, would you say?

LA No - entertainer. I don't like to put any luggage on it!

WA What about your other names - I've got a compilation and I guess you're on there in some capacity, is it DJ Smallcock?

LA I play as DJ Smallcock, Justice Yeldham and the Dynamic ribbon Device, Peeled Hearts Paste...I play in a band called Testicle Candy, a band called Bul-Go-Gi, a band called Black and Budget Minded...the Band from Bloody Elle. Lots of different projects I play in back at home, but I usually tour as Peeled Hearts Paste. I'm thinking of dropping that and keeping my solo name as DJ Smallcock. I thought of Peeled Hearts Paste in '92, and I'm kind of over the name really! DJ Smallcock has

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always been pre-recorded material, but considering I'm playing a large stylus in my mouth - which is turntablism in a way - I'm thinking of keeping just one name.

EP It's pretty extreme turntablism...playing your own body.

LA I started off doing radio shows and doing just really violent turntablism. And I kept breaking everything, so I started modifying the turntables to be more sturdy, using pins and rings and razor blades, then knives and all sorts of things until eventually it became the turkey skewer and the motorised turntables...instead of turntables I would use spinning motors.

EP Were you actually playing records, or just spinning metal discs?

LA I had circular saws and vegetable cutters, and I've had actual records, and grinding stones, and Tibetan Humming bowls, all spinning at high speeds, and playing them. I've kind of gone off that! I really like the mouth work, I think it has a lot more dynamic and changeable sounds. The actual pieces I can create by just using the humming bar in the mouth I find a lot more interesting, and performative. It's very visual, the 'Bridge' and other stuff I used to play was visual as well. I think the sounds lacked...there were a certain amount of sounds I could make, and that was it. But when I get into the mouth work, the range of sounds is much more exquisite and more enjoyable for me to play, and it's light as I said before. Put it in a backpack and go anywhere.

EP So there are other people who have done sound from body-art...very kind of cerebral. There's Stelarc, the Australian...

LA Yeah, Stelarc's an Aussie guy. He had that funny arm-thing he did. That was more on a performance art level, aurally it wasn't all that interesting. It didn't have the dynamic - an enjoyable dynamic - that's why I call myself an entertainer rather than a performance artist. Because performance artists are boring, and entertainers are fun to watch and they do an enjoyable show.

EP Stelarc - it's not only boring, but it's also kind of depressing isn't it? He's saying something very depressing about human beings.

LA Yeah! It's not so much fun. I don't get into all that hate-monger kind of stuff. I'm into giving a fun show that entertains people, just something people will enjoy. So much noise music is based on just relentless crap and making people feel uncomfortable. I like a fun dynamic that people can enjoy, and I don't think many people come in on that angle. The audience helps. I'm a shy performer!



EP When I got your CDs out of the blue, [followed soon by a CD from Phlegm] I kind

of assumed there was a whole scene of free noise going on in Australia...is that true?

LA Free noise, no...there's a scene of experimental musicians, but free noise, there's very little free noise. A few people. But I think it's all relative - small populations in Australia and all that. It's quite healthy, but as far as noise music goes there's me and a couple of other individuals. Phlegm rock hard! They don't exist any more. There's a new band called Menstruation Sisters, comprising two members of Phlegm. They're like my favourite band in the whole world at the moment. They're fuckin fantastic - you should see them. But they're not free noise - they're rock. Not your everyday rock or anything like that. They're fuckin out there, but still not free noise in any respect.

EP Are you going out on a limb, doing what you're doing in your home country?

LA Yeah, there's no-one really interested in what I'm doing. The gigs are very small. It depends on the gig. I play a lot of raves these

entertainer and when you're in that environment you get huge crowds, everyone gets into it and they dance like motherfuckers. You go to fuckin' noise shows, experimental noise shows, and everyone sits down, they clap politely, you really feel like shooting them, you know! When you play at a Techno gig everyone's fuckin dancing to your music. You're making an extreme noise - or textured, dynamic noise like I like to make - they're dancing, I really love that and it makes me feel good playing to a crowd like that, rather than pretentious fucking noise fans or experimental music patrons that...I don't really know what they're into it for. I don't understand them really. I don't get those people...they're just nerd music collector motherfuckers and they shit me to a large extent! I'm probably biting the hand that feeds me, running an experimental music label and all! (Laughs) Well, fuck you!

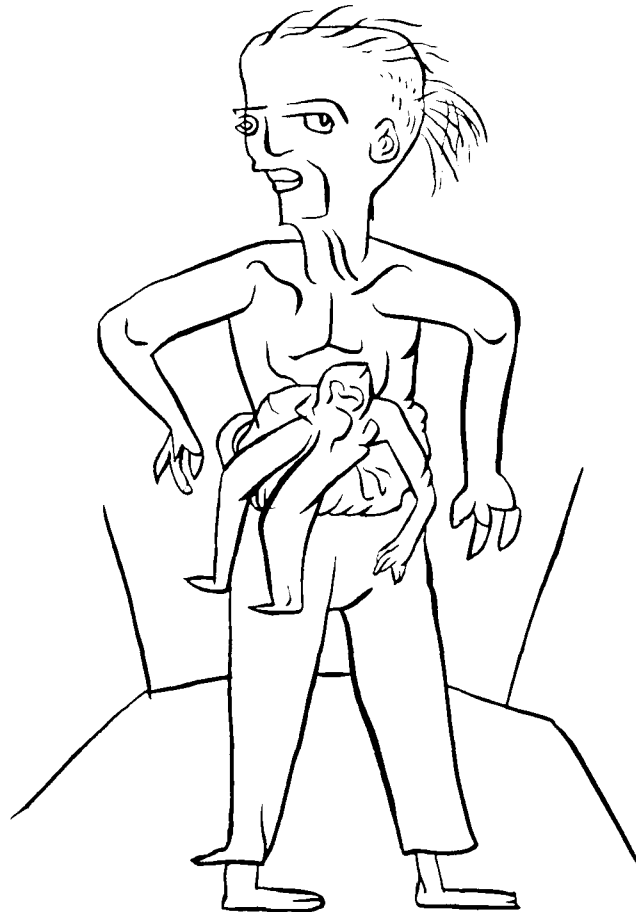
WA: I think it's always the way. You (Ed) have done comics in the past, and I've done comics in the past, and you can end up hating your own audience.

EP: Well you're right about experimental music. I mean I go to some of these experimental music things, I probably have been a nerd myself in that sense! But the audience are too polite, they don't always appear to enjoy it, and there's a real staid collector mentality behind it. I agree that, if you can get out there and entertain people with it...

LA It's a very elitist mentality, as well. I was talking to Nomex tonight, and he knew some guy in Holland that had built a 'bridge' similar to mine. We were talking about the fact that experimental musicians are very precious about their ideas, if they build an instrument and someone does the same thing, they get really really shitty! But I actually enjoy that, because imagine if the guy that invented the guitar was the only person that ever played the guitar! Nothing would ever come out of it, because every individual has something new to bring to an instrument, and if you have that attitude, like 'this instrument's mine, I've invented it, no-one else can fuckin play it' - it's just fucking stupid, because every person that takes that instrument up is going to attack it in a very different context and come out with completely different things. I've heard of people doing similar

things to my 'glove' that I invented, with the styluses on each finger - the same with the 'Bridge', and it makes me happy to think people are doing similar things, and playing similar instruments. They're all going to come out differently in the end, because you've got a mind and individuality behind that. The instrument doesn't make the sound, it's the person behind the instrument that makes the sound, and that's what's good in the end. If you're gonna be so precious, I don't know...fuck off!

EP You're not out there demanding a copyright from these people, then!



days, and collaborate with Techno DJs...I get large crowds there and they really love what I'm doing. But it's got beats behind it! If I got up there and played without the Techno DJ with me, I'm not sure what they'd think. Noise and Techno go really well together. You have that underlying noise, and then you've got the beats on top of it. Everyone's dancing, going wild and there's really freaky sounds. People are getting really bored with Techno, cause it's fucking ten years on or even longer. Whacking noise in there with it just brings up the interest. Really crazy. The gigs I enjoy most at the moment are my Techno gigs, cause, as I said I like to be an

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LA Not at all! I'd be glad to be ripped off, to see what other people do with my ideas. Then again I wouldn't even claim them as my ideas. There's a lot of synchronicity in ideas, and I'm sure other people, at the same time I've come up with things, have come up with things...the Kombi album I put out [*Music to Drive-By*], I recorded that in '94. And then I heard about these people in Rogue's Gallery in Japan, who drive around Osaka and make car music. And they sound really wild! When I go to Osaka next I'm gonna get in that car and have them do a show for me - but I wasn't like 'Oh, they fucking made car music, the bastards, they ripped off my idea!', I didn't think that all! When I read an interview with them, they came up with this exact same idea about the exact same time I did, of making music with their car. But they came up with a completely different angle, they contact-mike their engine and all different parts of their car, and they have two audience passengers in the back, and they drive around and do their thing. While my Kombi album is like a complete accident where the car stereo was malfunctioning and made really weird sounds and I just decided to record it. So - similar ideas, but completely different approaches. And I haven't heard the Rogue's Gallery stuff yet, but I can imagine it being completely different to A Kombi, and I respect that - because car music fucking rocks!

WA There was that Spanish bloke who did it with a motorbike as well.

EP Yes, erm...Jordi Vallis. It's his motorbike engine. Again, totally different as you say. I think, particularly in experimental music, people are very possessive of their ideas...because it's like that's all they've got! Instead of being a healthy scene where people are sharing ideas, it's become like a lot of little islands...you've got to hang onto what you've got and protect it at all costs, against all comers, and this I find very very sad.

LA I get compared to Masonna a lot, because my sets are very short - and I wear a belt! Besides that - the music's completely fucking

different! I'm nothing like Masonna, besides the short set and the belt! So what are people comparing me to Masonna for, for fuck's sake? It's a joke...a real joke. Most people have got a small mind. They can't see behind the conceptual idea and the actual aural endings of the music, they don't actually *listen*.

EP And it's a music journalism thing too, because it's far easier to read about an idea in the music press than it is to go out and find out for yourself what it sounds like.

WA I think it's something to do with the fear of appearing stupid. People are afraid of just enjoying something on a very straightforward level. It has to have all this stuff attached...

LA It's too fucking intellectual for my liking.

EP How long have you been doing your work?

LA I started out when I was doing radio shows in 1992-93, just doing turntables over the air and ended up...the guys from Phlegm heard my show one day and invited me to do it live in a venue in September 1994. And I've been doing it live since then, and developing it since then. This is in Sydney.

EP And the A Kombi thing has been quite well documented...you were living out of the back of your van at the time. Were you a surfer?

LA Yeh, I was living out the back of my van. I don't know if it's been well documented! I mean, one interview in *Bananafish* doesn't make quite well documented! I was a surfer, when I used to live in the Gold Coast, but I kinda gave that up when I got beaten up by skegs one day!

EP Skegs? That sounds nasty- what are skegs?

LA That's kind of a slang term for a surfer. I started surfing when I moved to the Gold Coast, when I was 12, and did that for a few years until I was about 14, and then started getting really interested in experimental music and stopped surfing. At the time you think it's uncool, and you start wearing black and all

that kinda shit you do when you're 14! It was Goth thing...it was the 80s, the late 80s. I started getting into strange music, not really Goth but more like Teenage Jesus and The Jerks, and Foetus, and the Slums - which is Goth in a way but more kind of experimental Goth. That led on into my interests of today. But that's where music started for me.

EP It sounds like from the start you were taking it out to people, doing broadcasts, live shows...I mean you're not a bedroom guy.

LA No, I don't play in my bedroom very often. I like to play in front of people. I enjoy it front of people and I don't record at home very often. I bought myself a DAT player and I hardly ever use the fucking thing! Most of my albums - there are a few studio tracks, but four or five live tracks and most of it's live. I wanna get into doing studio a bit more. I'm doing a BBC session next week, which I'm hoping will go well. That's for *Mixing It* (on Radio 3). One of the presenters came to Australia just after I released A Kombi and went into a dance music store and asked for something weird! The guy behind the counter knew me and sold him A Kombi. Then he came back a year later looking to do a documentary on Sydney musicians and I was over in Japan doing a tour. I got back during the last few days when he was still in Sydney doing interviews, and I heard that they wanted to talk to me so I contacted them and did the interview and stuff, and they said 'come and do a session'.

EP It's not many people who come to London for the first time and do a BBC session!

LA Yeah! I'm quite stoked about that! A lot of people say bad things about *Mixing It*, but if they're willing to take a risk on a completely unknown artist like myself, give me a session and then broadcast it - they're fucking right by me! I don't know what the programme's like because I've never listened to it, but you keep hearing... 'Oh those guys are fucking toffee-nosed assholes!' I don't think

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so...no-one else has given me a go like that, and that doesn't sound toffee-nosed to me. Sounds like they've got open minds and they're willing to take chances...I don't give a shit what people say, it's good. I'm really fucking happy about that!

EP Well it's the English disease...I've just exhibited it myself...the context is everything to us.

LA Well, that exists everywhere. In Australia we call it the 'tall poppies syndrome'. If you're successful in Australia, everyone will write you off or say bad things about you. It's more like a jealousy thing - I don't really get it. If you do good things, everyone's more willing to knock it and say bad things...it's weird, people don't like success for some reason. I like success, I like successful people, they're doing what they wanna do and doing it well, there's nothing wrong with that! Why knock them down, why treat them like shit? It's hard to get anywhere, and then when you get there people do that to you...it's stupid.

EP The bedroom thing...I feel that about a lot of New Zealand music. The guy from Opprobrium said to me that most New Zealand bands hardly ever play live, they make lots of cassette recordings at home...there aren't even that many venues, I think...

LA There's a big spotlight on New Zealand bands. All those same bands who play in their bedrooms and don't play any gigs in New Zealand, they can go to America and other places, and they've got a large following. A lot of people are interested in New Zealand music...a lot of the music's really good, but I don't understand the mentality of scenes. Like there's the New Zealand scene, the Japan scene, and all the focus is on one place rather than on individuals. Individuals everywhere are doing great things. But it seems that if you're in a certain place - like a noiseician in Japan, or if you're doing drone music in New Zealand, you get a lot further than people doing drone music in Australia or drone music in South Africa, or drone music in fuckin Taiwan, or

noise music in Taiwan. It's a location thing. People focus too much on locations and places rather than the actual music coming out of anywhere in the world. A more mainstream example would be the Seattle scene. There were some good bands coming out of Seattle, but every single band that was in Seattle got this huge fucking press - just for fucking living there! It's just a very slack attitude. I respect a lot of New Zealand musicians, I know a few of them and they're good friends of mine. I was in America [in a record shop] and they've got New Zealand sections, and Japanese sections, and you can't find an Australian CD anywhere!

EP Have you been to America?

LA Yeah, I toured America in 1997-98. I did shows in San Francisco, LA, New York...Providence, Boston. It was good. Toured with a band called Deerhoof, which fucking rock the earth! They're fucking great! They're got a really good pop sensibility, crossed with kind of a No Wave aesthetic. I just love pop, I love hooks. This band has hooks, but at the same time it's really dirty! And that goes together, picture perfect postcard for me. Love that band...Deerhoof!



EP What is the appeal of noise? Why do we like it?

LA I'm not really sure...I prefer a real dynamic noise which chops and changes and goes all over the place, and I like the journey in sound that it gives you. It's not always the same, it goes up and it goes down and it goes all over the place. Then again, there's a lot of noise which I personally don't like, which is just relentless, and loud, and goes on...and they do their shows for an hour. I'm sure some people actually like that but on a personal level I don't get into relentless noise, I like dynamic noise. I just like sonics, you feel the volume go through your body, it comes in and comes out again. When it's relentless, it's just there all the time and then it stops. But with

dynamic noise, it's kind of a journey through sound...I guess...and that's what I enjoy about listening to noise.

EP You're not confrontational then, not trying to repel them and say 'deal with it because it's so loud'.

LA No, I wanna engage the audience. I want them to love me! I don't want to repel the audience or make their ears bleed, or be really loud and all that kind of shit. I want them to see an engaging performance that they enjoy from start to finish and go through all different levels of sound and stuff.

EP That's really refreshing, because sometimes you read about this noise stuff and you hear it, and you think it might almost be like a dead end. The last place anyone could possibly go if you're interested in music. The only way it can go is to get louder and more intense and more confrontational.

LA Well, I think the loud and confrontational thing has been done. It's over...I mean it's a fatalistic attitude to say something's over, but from the CDs I've heard I don't really think you can go much further with the relentless really loud approach to noise music, you know. I think you have to take it in different levels. The way I try and do it is to create something more performative, and visual, and enjoyable to watch. Because, table-noise - you know - FUCK! A bunch of assholes behind a desk with a bunch of pedals! Twiddling knobs and sliders for an hour - is not much to watch! I don't mind listening to some of it on CD, because some of it interests me. Some table-noise musicians are really dynamic and they have a sound and aural appreciation that I love, but watching them really bores the shit out of me! I like it when noise people get rid of the table and they have some kind of performance aspect that they work with, it becomes a lot more interesting and you can watch it and enjoy it on a lot more different levels. It is a show! You're in front of people and you've gotta remember that. If you're doing shows it's not all about the music,



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there's other aspects you have to consider. Because, why would you be playing in front of people in the first place? You may as well just sit there, record something at home and play the fucking DAT! Why do they set up all that equipment?

EP: What about your record label, Dual Plover? How long has that been going?

LA It started out when I put out A Kombi, in 1996. I recorded it in '94 and I was trying to shop it to labels to put it out. I went to all the Australian experimental labels, like Extreme and Dorobo. Which are completely fucked, Extreme are fucked! I'll put this on the record...they're gonna hate me for this, but I don't really care cause they put out a lot of stuff from overseas, and I don't think they look into the local scene whatsoever. Which is what pisses me off about them...some of the stuff they put out is good, and I can't complain, but when they don't look locally it really shits me. They're the only two Australian labels with any profile whatsoever - and the Australian content [of their catalogue] is so small. It shits me, because there is a lot of really good Australian music they could be putting out. Which I don't get. So after shopping with them, and no-one was interested, I thought I'm gonna have to do this myself. So I put out the CD...sent out promos...got a really good response. People like Merzbow were writing back to me, saying 'this is fucking great, you're doing something really new and interesting'. And then there was *Bananafish* writing to me saying 'let's do an interview', and I'd never done anything before. I was stoked! I don't get it. The people in Australia weren't willing to give me a go - and I do it myself and send it overseas and other people give me a go. I love them for that. I really wish Australians would like what is actually happening in Australia, because the Australian music scene would be a lot healthier internationally if that was the case. Just like New Zealand is! Cause I think it's a lot healthier over there, people support each other and that's why it's at the strength it is now. It's not like there's more people doing experimental music in New Zealand - it's just that they've got some kind of appreciation of what they do, and they don't look to overseas, and they have their own way of doing things. Whereas Australia always looks to overseas - well not on the whole, but the people who are just doing their own thing are just ignored.

There's no communication between cities as well, because the cities are so far apart. There's so little communication between experimental - I hate the word experimental, but I keep using it anyway! - between Melbourne and Sydney, nobody knows what anybody's doing there...or between Sydney and Brisbane, the whole fuckin' country, everyone's doing stuff but it's all very backyard and hard to bridge that gap. Then you've got Perth in WA which is the most isolated city in the world! It's closer to Asia than it is to Sydney. Perth apparently has some good stuff going as well. I'm gonna be doing an experimental festival in Tasmania when I get home.

Well, that's why I started the label Dual Plover, because there was a lot of good music happening in Sydney and the only labels happening were the ones in Melbourne, there were no labels in Sydney. So I thought there's

something good going on here. I'm gonna cotton onto it and I'm gonna take it as my own - and help everybody out in Sydney at the same time. It's not all just noise. I put out pop music, like Alternahunk and Funky Terrorist. I love pop music and I've got a very soft spot for that, so I put out them. Alternahunk are some of the greatest girls you ever met! Love those girls to death! I wish I could do more and release more, but there's only a certain amount of money I've got. I started the label on the fuckin' dole - not eating much, just to put out the first CD!

It was expensive at first, but I started a consolidation point for CD manufacture in Sydney. I set up a deal with a local manufacturer on a bulk level, then I do everyone else's CDs through me. Like I did the Phlegm CDs, the Hiss CDs, the Sigma label. I do CDs in America and New Zealand and Belgium, because I've got this bulk rate and they're giving me CDs really fucking cheaply. I do it for independents only, I don't do it for any labels. If they want to release music independently, they come to me for a really cheap rate - I mean like 95 cents a disc, Australian. Which is about 30p or 40p! When I put out A Kombi it cost me a lot of money and I thought I can't do this, it's too much, I'm on the dole, it's really hard. So I just rang up the CD manufacturer and acted like a professional businessman, and said 'I'm starting up a brokerage, I'm going to have all this business for you. What kind of rates will you give me?' And they gave me a rate, and I started telling everybody I could get CDs done at this price, and I've been doing heaps of CDs for everyone since. And it's really helped Sydney music to a large degree - I don't know if the repercussions have really fully been felt yet, but the Phlegm CDs, the MS CDs and the Sportsbra CDs are starting to get reviews overseas and they're starting to tour...I pressed the Sigma editions through my consolidation point, and they're about to tour Europe. So it's really good helping out Australian music.

WA Just out of curiosity, did you ever like Severed Heads at all? Because it's the only Australian group I really know, and I was just amazed that they never did better than they did.

LA I must admit they were a bit before my time. When I was getting into experimental music, they started doing all that disco early-Industrial level, compared to early records I've heard since, where they do all the cut-up tape musique concrete type stuff they were doing in the early days, which I liked a lot better. I enjoyed what they did earlier. Australia has a really good history - SPK, The Birthday Party, and Foetus I guess - though they made most of their records since he left the country. We still like to call Foetus our own! J G Thirlwell would probably refuse to say he's Australian these days! I read somewhere he doesn't even wanna re-enter the country at any point. I love his work.

EP Are you playing anywhere else in Europe this trip?

LA I've been to Rotterdam, did a music festival organised by Jon Rose. I got to play with Otomo Yoshihide. He's a great guy, and we're gonna do an album together when I hit Japan on the way back home. At this festival

he really liked what I was doing. He said I'm the most extreme turntablist in the world!

I first met him years ago in 1993 - I did an interview with him when I was still doing radio in Sydney. I got onto his Ground-Zero compilation - he did *Consume Red*, and on the third one in the series the general public got to remix the album. And I did my DJ Smallcock remix of that, which ended up being the first track on it. It's really kind of a funny story, cause I was in Osaka and just read about this Ground-Zero remix album, on the last day submissions could be in. So I thought Fuck, I wanna do that! Otomo was playing that night - I went down to Timebomb records, bought the album, dragged it back home, attached the CD to one of my motors, destroyed it with my humming bars, made this complete load of noise remixing the record analogue-ly, by using the surface of the CD rather than the actual sounds on the CD - straight onto DAT - got it videoed and photographed at the same time - went out and got the photographs developed - took the video and put it all into a box, went to Otomo's gig that night and handed it to him. And then a couple of months later I get an email saying 'Congratulations! You got on the album!' - when I speak to Otomo he says 'You're my favourite track, the best track!' out of all of 200 submissions, and he said he got really bored listening to them, but mine excited him, just the completely different approach I took to remixing the album. He loved it!

All the conditions were that you had to use the CD as source material. I think I kept within those guidelines. The whole thing was broken in half by the time I'd finished, so I never actually listened to the CD! I'm kind of curious to hear it!

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*Later we received this amusing anecdote from Lucas re his Mixing It Session:*

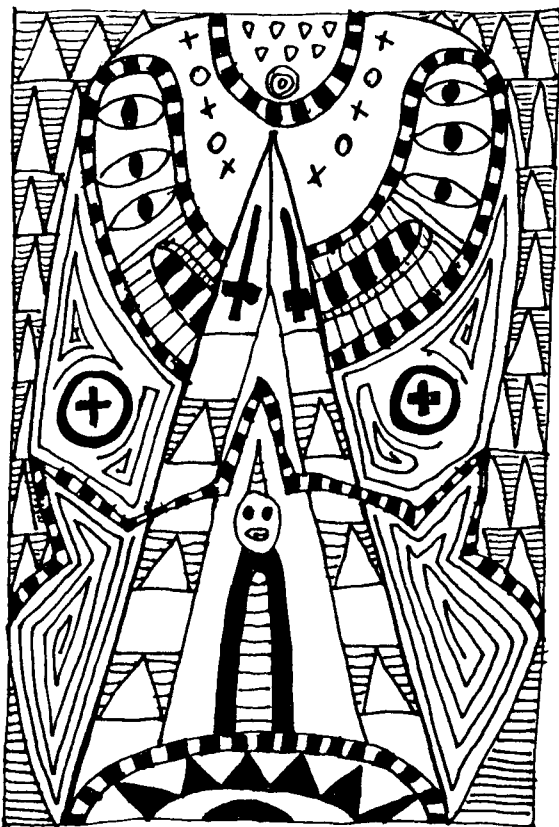
During my session for Radio 3's Mixing It program a funny thing happened. I was playing my humming bar through a Marshall stack and an Ampeg bass amplifier simultaneously and was having an absolute ball, when I noticed unfamiliar men watching me from the side. It was The Flaming Lips who were doing a John Peel session in the next studio. Apparently they had come over to complain about my volume, but after seeing what I was doing they flipped out and asked me to perform a solo during an instrumental part of one of their songs. I didn't really know much about them at the time, but they offered me 45 quid for my services so I said yes, still unsure if what I did made it to the final mix as I haven't heard from them since but keep your ears out for their Peel sessions and have a listen for an

**outburst of noise!**

~~~~~

**Dual Plover label:
PO Box 983,
Darlinghurst, NSW
130, Australia
email lucas@ebom.org
www.ebom.org/plover**

THE DRONING ONES



Muslimgauze

Iranian Female Olympic Table Tennis Team Theme
HOLLAND, STAALPLAAT, MUSLIMIM
016 (1999)

Here's a very beautiful continuous drone of some 32 minutes length with added layers of grit and sunshine in a massive sandwich of dry cured meat fit to choke any listener not man enough to venture into the exotic cafe of Muslimgauze. Few droning ones have dared to keep something going this long and not resisted the temptation to vary the pace somewhere. Not our Bryn Jones folks. It would be sheer folly to pick apart the separate ingredients of such a tasty dish as this spicy hot bowl of rice and meat, so I won't even bother. A helicopter ride whirling you into a new world, a strange and amazing journey with frequent pauses for mouthfuls of chewy liquorice hashish bars. From the Dutch label in Amsterdam who have released that many Muslimgauze products over the years that you'd need a steamshovel to even deliver them to your front door. And the rest! What a shame to think that the powerful and original creator behind such a friendly and welcoming noise as this is now dead, and yet hundreds of other horrible people are still alive, stalking the globe.

ED PINSENT

Rapoon

Easterly 6 or 7
HOLLAND, STAALPLAAT STCD 114
(1997)

Beautiful, evocative and extremely listenable relaxing, rapturous sounds. An nice recent one from Robin Storey, the former Zoviet*France guy who we interviewed briefly in SP4. Hunting for his back catalogue I found a whole rack of his work in Amsterdam, where the Staalplaat people have devoted themselves to making vast tracts of electronic, experimental, industrial and related musics available. They seem to favour one-man acts like Merzbow, Rapoon and Muslimgauze - the latter has an entire Staalplaat programme of small-run editions intended for a devoted fanbase who have to hear everything he produces (and there's a lot of it). Rapoon has probably done well to leap onto the Staalplaat raft. The hot news is that his 'new direction' involves using more beats. 'Falling More Slowly' contains a marvellous Radio Four shipping forecast sample against a gently oscillating drone; there was no need for him to put any music with it really, since (as devoted listeners will know) it's music already. That shipping forecast, with its ceremonial listing of exotic weather station names and numbers we don't understand, is pure surrealist poetry to millions. This equally exotic CD, alive with foreign music derived from records or shortwave radio samples,

extends the Canaxis theorem into new realms, and is a shimmering wonder throughout, a voyage through the air over the seven seas of the ancients to an Arabian Nights land of mystical delights. With nice monoprint artworks on the sleeve by Storey, and Arabic vocals from Kadija Lourlham.

ED PINSENT

*Staalplaat @ PO Box 11453, 1001 GI
Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

Oren Ambarchi

Stacte LP

AUSTRALIA, JERKER PRODUCTIONS
(1998)

Very good solo LP from Ambarchi, one of the main men in Phlegm and Sportsbra - see elsewhere this issue for a Phlegm CD review. Side one of this private press LP is a classic improvised guitar drone, allegedly recorded direct to one-track cassette with one guitar at one sitting. The richness of tonal warmth here recalls the fine achievements of UK guitarist Neil Campbell in this area, but if anything Ambarchi's approach is yet more single-minded. Not so intent on exploring the overtones or harmonic range as maintaining a precise and focussed clarity of tone in the generated sound. The effects pedals (if any) may contribute, but Ambarchi never lets them get control of the situation - his mountain stream of pure sound remains unsullied by the murky mud of too many digital delay / fuzz pedals. And how many avant-noisenik guitarists these days can make such a boast? Highly recommended when you need a good 20-minute prayer workout, and you can't be bothered falling to your knees.

Side 2 presents a more complex electronic tableau, a relentless succession of noises and notes that appears to be random electronic gibberish, but in fact has a mathematical logical undercurrent running throughout. It's the language of a primitive computer struggling to make itself heard, alien communications bombarding the airwaves.

Limited to 150 copies in handmade sleeves. At time of writing, this LP available from Fourth Dimension and BWCD.

ED PINSENT

Ashtray Navigations, Blues for Black Afternoon /

Universal Indians, Blues for Nervous Systems

SPLIT CD, NO LABEL NO DATE NO NUMBER

In the welter of home recording releases, it has to be said there is nobody quite like Phil Todd and his splendid Ashtray Navigations musical exploits. No other music sounds as chronically ill as this; symptomatic of a week-long influenza fever, fraught with hallucinogenic visions of discomfiture. To hear the creator himself talk, you'd think this was the result of a severely cynic philosophy; a man painfully aware of the masses of modern music lurking out there like dark stars in the night sky (his very job obliges him to listen to most of it, or at the least acknowledge its

existence). So to give himself the edge over the horde, he strives for a sound nobody else has. He works with pre-treated tape as his blank canvas, recorded on an underpowered 4-track that will give that queasy, wobbly sensation to the listener. But Todd is too modest! The fact is this music is utterly compelling, whatever the means; take this CD, starting off with a whimpering puppy of a toy organ loop, the corridors of sound-leakage, ambient room recordings and noisy clutter are followed by a suite of metal guitar solos. A mini-history of

feedback guitar! At least one of these is either a straight lift from a Keiji Haino record, or a spot-on pastiche of same; suspecting Todd's scepticism of the black Japanese Angel God which so many journalists (myself guilty of this too) are content to accept as some divine shaman, it's probably fair to assume this segment is a major mickey-take, surrounded with so many quotation marks it's in some realm beyond irony.

Universal Indians are a group from Michigan, I believe. A cassette guitar band who hold little interest for me, but they must have their followers somewhere on this enormous globe full of more broadminded people than I. They play very loud guitar and drums music, but it's also turgid and slow and soon becomes wearisome, while the vocals are wrenched from the chest cavity of the singer as though he's being given the Heimlich maneuver by a masked wrestler. Their contribution, and the silly photocopyer sleeve art to this release, tend to drag it back to fanzine level; which is a shame as I think Phil Todd deserves better.

ED PINSENT

Adrian Utley and Mount Vernon Arts Lab Warminster CD mini-album

OCHRE RECORDS OCH040 (1999)

This is sadly a rather dreary drone...it's a collaboration between the Portishead guy and the genial Scot Drew Mulholland, both of whom are highly regarded I know, but all the same this going-nowhere excursion into the land of loops and queer noises simply bored me rigid. There's a bog-standard trip-hop beat trundling along behind it, along with a smorgasbord of effects dribbling in and out of focus; these effects and sounds range from the clichéd to the ineffectual to just plain silly. The work was apparently executed in the mail, which suggests that the two players didn't even meet up in a studio, but rather swapped hard-discs through the post, overdubbing and re-editing each other until



they wound up with this. Actually that does sound like a pretty cool way of working, minimising the human interaction and concentrating on the agreed task at hand - which would be fine if there were a decent idea here to begin with. In fact, the idea - according to the press release at any rate - seems to be to present a whistle-stop tour through the history of avant-garde music. 'A 23 minute pocket symphony traversing Abstract Minimalism, Moody Jazz, Musique Concrete and Improvisation'. This I find pretty hard to swallow; there seem to be rather a lot of people who think they can footele around with minimalism, improvised music, musique concrete and electronic composition as though they were simply trying on shirts in a clothing store. What colossal arrogance; it's one thing to enjoy and discuss the music, but quite another to assume that you know all there is to know about it just because you own more rare records than anyone else. So - to be a tad more charitable, this isn't an unpleasant racket, helped considerably by live strings from Caroline Subedi and flutes from Morag Brown, but it would be helped by having a few more substantial ideas.

Warminster lacks drama, tension, shape - it just lumbers into your life and lies there, like a half-set jelly or a half-baked soufflé that didn't rise.

ED PINSENT

Thurston Moore, with Tom Sural

Not Me

FOURTH DIMENSION FDCD57 (1998)

Actually not much of a droner...low-key free improv? A short and tasty morsel from the prolific axe of Thurston, resulting from a live pairing at an intimate venue with drummer Tom Sural. The second cut 'Lydia's Moth' is the one that does it for me - a series of harmonic strums and spacey major chords, some real *playing* and not someone posturing behind the safety of a sandbag-full of feedback and volume. The delicate notes remain suspended in air, coaxed rather than

propelled along by a very delicate jazz drumming backdrop from Sural; a bit like a less aggressive version of Sunny Murray. The title cut is a little more humdrum, in line with the monochrome sleeve art of the CD (stills from the Warhol movie that never was!); and very reminiscent of the weird 'quiet' Fushitsusha LP which was released on Avant some years ago. If we're namechecking influences, there's bound to be some Derek Bailey in here too, but isn't it grand the way American artists seem to celebrate and exploit their influences? I mean compared to what I perceive to be our own British obsession with innovation and originality where we try our utmost to either pretend we have no influences whatsoever, or do our best to conceal them from prying know-it-all journalists. Sorry, but that's how it looks to me sometimes - a two-handed farcical game pandering to the late 20th century thirst for novelty at any cost. Anyway, one last observation about this record and it's a trivial one, but I've rarely heard a live LP where the noises of the audience contribute so much to the music; there's the most musical cough ever captured on record here, and some oddly touching audience bellowing comments to boot. A CD reissue of an artefact originally on 10" vinyl on the same label, and a follow up to *Kangarbenmelodie* by the same duo. This one (according to Mr Patrick of Muckraker) works within a 'more sparse frame'. Who says Sonic Youth are all washed up? 'Not Me'...

ED PINSENT

Rod Poole December 96

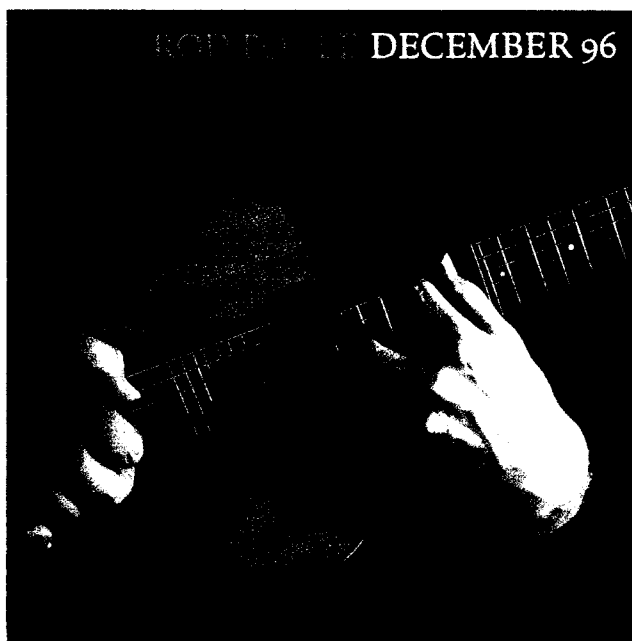
USA, WIN RECORDS WIN031 (1998)

This is virtually flawless, a recording of pristine beauty, deeply involving music and executed with painstaking perfection in the performance. So who the heck is Rod Poole?

He's an English guitarist who plays in just Intonation - what a relief to hear that La Monte Young hasn't (yet) secured, with the help of a team of highly-paid lawyers, the monopoly on that idea. This single CD, dare I say it, communicates just as many ideas as the five CDs on Young's *Well-Tuned Piano* box; it is (arguably) better played, and better recorded; and every bit as beautiful without having to occupy as much of your listening time. One understands that duration is important with the New York Minimalist school that (aping the big canvasses of Warhol and the Abstract Expressionists) decided that well-nigh eternal droning (four hours minimum) would be a standard feature, but Mr Poole gets to the heart of the matter in less time with just as much commitment to musical expression.

Rod Poole lives in Los Angeles, but was born in Oxford UK; a career as a classically trained guitarist appears to have led him down a singular path. In the CD booklet he publishes concise diagrams and charts explaining the significance of the perfect chords and tunings that can be explored within the peculiar world of just Intonation, and no words are wasted justifying or interpreting this to non-believers; Poole lives in a universe where this approach is already accepted as standard, and simply waits for you to catch up. He plays on specially constructed acoustic guitars, in

The Sound Projector Sixth issue 1999



Just Intonation tunings; the strings ring clearly with a precision that speaks of the mathematical splendour of the chosen system. Wouldn't Bach have felt at home here? Perhaps not, since (perhaps as a token of his indifference to the established classical music world) Poole consorts with ex-members of The Magic Band and The Mothers of Invention in his new home town. Perhaps this is indicative of a lesson which most of you already learned - don't turn your back on people who offend your bourgeois prejudices because they appear to be low-lives, freaks, hippies, druggies, or rock musicians; they might just turn out to be the only real geniuses left on the planet.

Maybe it's worth pointing out that I'm a major ignoramus here - I still don't really understand just Intonation or why it's so important. I can see that it's challenging, but probably like a lot of awkward people I just dig the oppositional anti-classical music stance without fully understanding (a) what is being opposed and deconstructed or (b) what is taking its place in the revolution. On the other hand, anyone with a pair of ears will know that this is just gorgeous, excruciatingly beautiful and something that stands a chance of being a ghost of the sort of music we will hear in Heaven, no?

ED PINSENT

Alphane Moon

The Echoing Grove

AUSTRALIA, CAMERA OBSCURA
RECORDS CAM019CD (1999)

Very good...although issued in Australia, this is our old friends from Wales, Daffyd Roberts and Ruth, the mysterious young duo who also record as Our Glassie Azoth (OGA) and to whom we devoted a deal of space in issue 4. This time they take their name from a sci-fi story by Philip K Dick, but don't hold that against them. On the longer tracks here, especially the finale 'Reap a Field of Light', a successful quasi-religious dementia is achieved through a secular devotion; everything builds up to a manic, twittering field of shimmering echo and insanely strummed guitar that is

virtually bouncing through the cosmos like a runaway planet, cut loose from its orbit. When you encounter such moments, life is quickened and made to appear worthwhile - one real reason to listen to music. This CD therefore has a lot to recommend it, although if I had to choose I would prefer the OGA reverb-based drifting witchery. This Alphane Moon incarnation is more psychedelic, almost 100% guitar-based, recorded (rather obviously) on a four-track, and working within

parameters which allow for occasional folk songs (which are frankly not up to much) yawped out in a dour voice not unlike Robin Williamson on quaaludes. None the less heavy than OGA on effects pedals; there's more digital delay and reverb here than most people manage in their everyday diet. For all of the reasons above, these musicians have become instant favourites with the international diehard Psych-Prog conspiracy. Just kidding. Of course we love the Freek Emporium and Ptolemaic! The sleeve note devotes quite some attention to the place it was recorded, in rural Wales; echoes here of Jimmy Page paying his tributes to Bron-Yr-Awr, the remote Welsh village which birthed the exquisite acoustic constructions to be heard on the third LP by Led Zeppelin. If you liked lining up the arcane symbols on that revolving sleeve, I'd guess you'll enjoy the sumptuous sleeve art on *The Echoing Grove*, early woodcuts printed in gold with very elegant matching typography.

ED PINSENT

Alan Lamb

Original Masters - Night

Passage
AUSTRALIA
DOROBO,
DOROBO013
(1998)

In 1976 Alan Lamb visited his sister and her husband at 'Faraway', their farm in the Great Southern Region of Western Australia. Running along the farm boundary he found a half-mile stretch of abandoned telephone wires. 12 poles and 6 wires,

all humming softly in the wind. He bought them for \$10 and began his Faraway Wind Organ project.

Years earlier in Scotland, Lamb had been inspired by the rhythms and harmonies he'd heard from telephone wires there. He made an emotional connection with the melodies he sensed and became determined to record their 'music' but was disappointed by the insufficient winds. At Faraway, a vast open landscape, Lamb got the winds he wanted and in late 1984 made the recordings that have been used to make up the majority of this release. After amassing dozens of hours raw material he set about 'composing' the sounds in the studio. As ridiculous as it may seem to some people this IS music and the wires are nothing more than a giant guitar or zither, strummed by the winds and windborne objects - insects and birds striking the wires as nature's plectrum.

The results are awesome; pure and primal tapestries of atmospheric sound that rise and fall like typical symphonies/ First you hear the wind itself and then its effect on the wires themselves as gentle humming vibrations enter the mix, building louder and louder into ethereal clangings and rumblings that sound like shipwrecks dragged across the ocean bed or phantom transmissions from deep space. Anyone who has listened in awe while a really powerful storm rips at your house, screaming like a banshee as it rattles the guttering and shakes the tiles loose, will understand the basic appeal of this music. It can only be experienced properly with the listeners full attention and played really loud. This way every tiny sound in the mix inspires potent imagery in the mind - the wires whipping against one another sound like alien phone sex while the creaking of the poles is the voices of poltergeists lost somewhere between the recorded and the experienced moment.

The Faraway Wind Organ is no more, destroyed by the relentless winds and the termites who ate the poles, making these recordings all the more unique. Any attempt to liken it to any other form of music is futile. Similar sounds have been achieved with the

ALPHANE MOON



∞ the Echoing Grove ∞

The Sound Projector 6ixth issue 1999

use of instruments and the manipulation of samples but I've never heard such basic instrumental materials as those that Lamb had to hand to so effectively convey so much. As with the whale song albums from the 70s I expect to hear this sampled by talents great and mediocre in the years to come. Something new is being said here but it may be some time before we are ready to understand what it is.

Contact: PO Box 22, Glen Waverley, Victoria
3150, Australia

RIK RAWLING

Remora, *Per-aa*

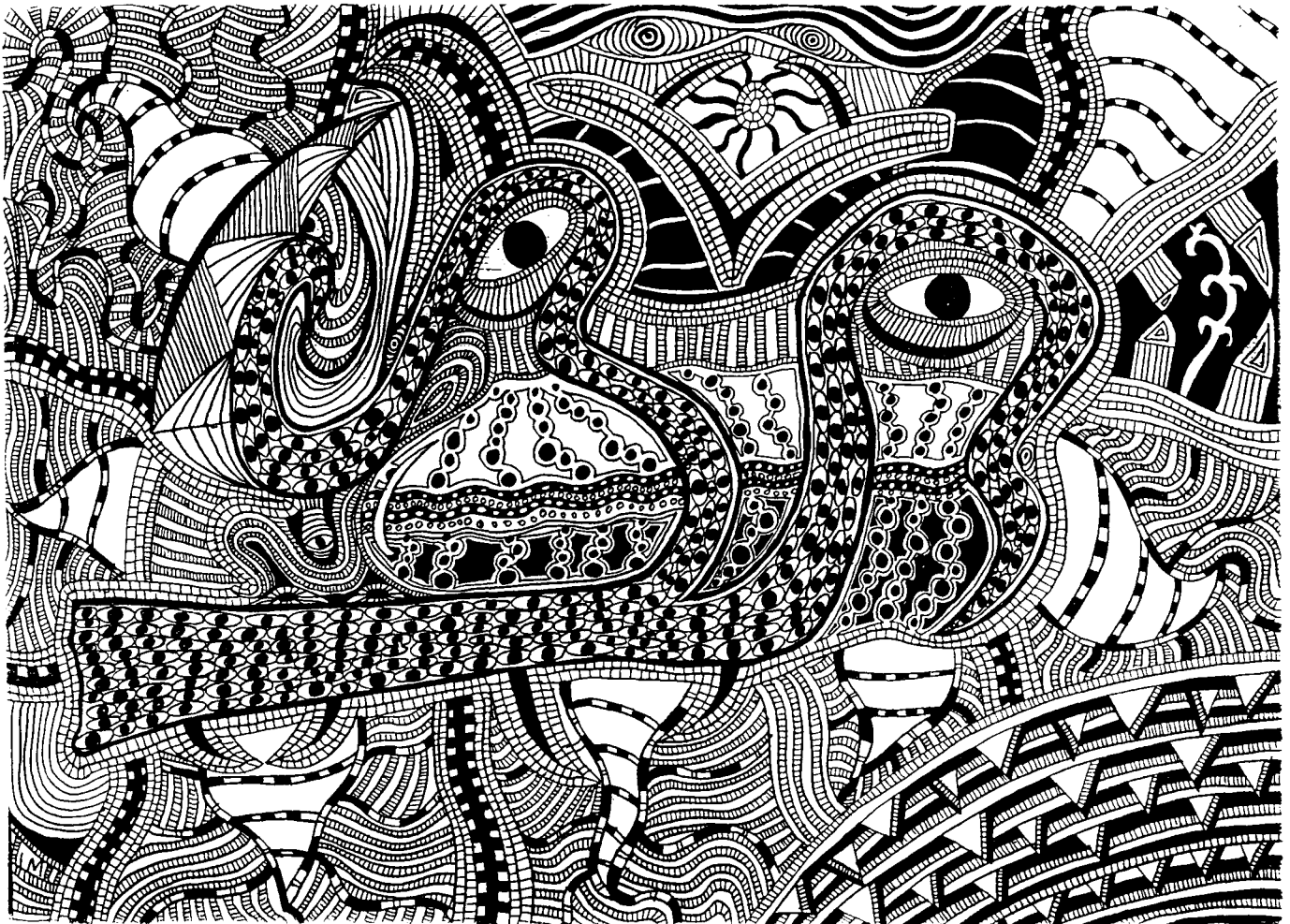
PRIVATE PRESS LATHE CUT LP
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Intensely powerful abstract drones recorded at home by this lone visionary. Musical buzz-saws, giant electric spinning-tops, an entire fairground of brightly-lit carousels whirling through the night of the Dark Carnival. Ian Middleton is Remora, and it's always worth pointing out that his visual art patterns itself after certain Outsider Art

images (and incidentally plugs into a small subculture of like-minded local artists who have grouped together and exhibited as The New Visionaries at the Bellevue Gallery in Edinburgh) and the same raw spirit informs his very singular sound-generation exercises. While perhaps not possessed of the same circumstances (neither economic nor psychiatric) as a Scottie Wilson, single-mindedly scratching his indian ink automatic markings into scraps of stiff cardboard with his scrappy old nib, Remora nonetheless exhibits that same driven quality in his music - that lends it the force of something produced by a man possessed, locked in that benign trance that enables a musician to transcend their materials and communicate direct with the inner spirits. Transcend I say, because the instruments and methods used to grind out these drones leave no recognisable traces on the LP; the focus of vision has simply elided them, leaving your ears free to ignore technique and drink in the purity that's concentrated within these sounds. Well all right, let's not be too pretentious - you *can* discern a synthesiser here, probably an analogue one too but I'm

not an expert on that. Naturally, many musicians have entered this benign trance-like state, whether they achieve it through their training in jazz modulation or classical notation, but one suspects Remora is one of those many gifted luminaries of the contemporary underground who have found a way to make it even simpler. He may not have learned his instruments or tape-delay system in any conventional way, but rather has exploited their qualities as machines to help him do the work he needs to do. I am fond of pointing out the success of this untutored naiveté in music, and hesitate before trotting out my same old shopping list again, so suggest you put down the mag now and do your utmost to snag a copy of this fine record before its absurdly limited stocks dwindle to zero. A lovely artefact to handle, too; pressed in clear vinyl, lathe cut by New Zealand craftsmen, Remora art labels printed in blue and housed in a black master bag on which the artist hath emblazoned small figures and lettering mit his quicksilver pen.

ED PINSENT



"...locked in that benign trance..."

The Sound Projector Sixth issue 1999

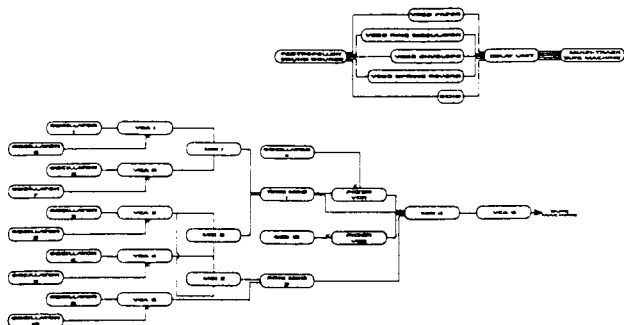
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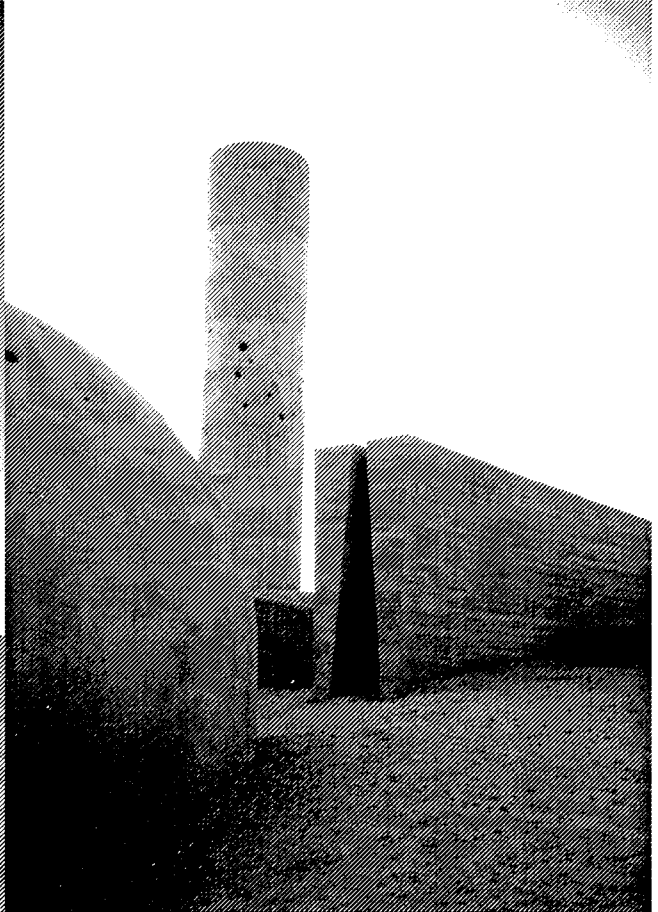
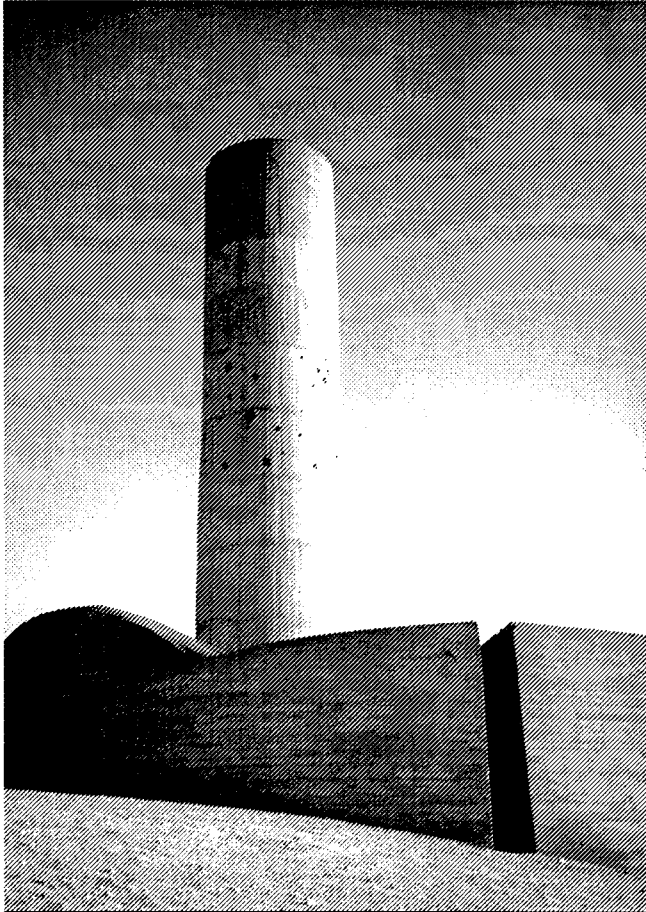
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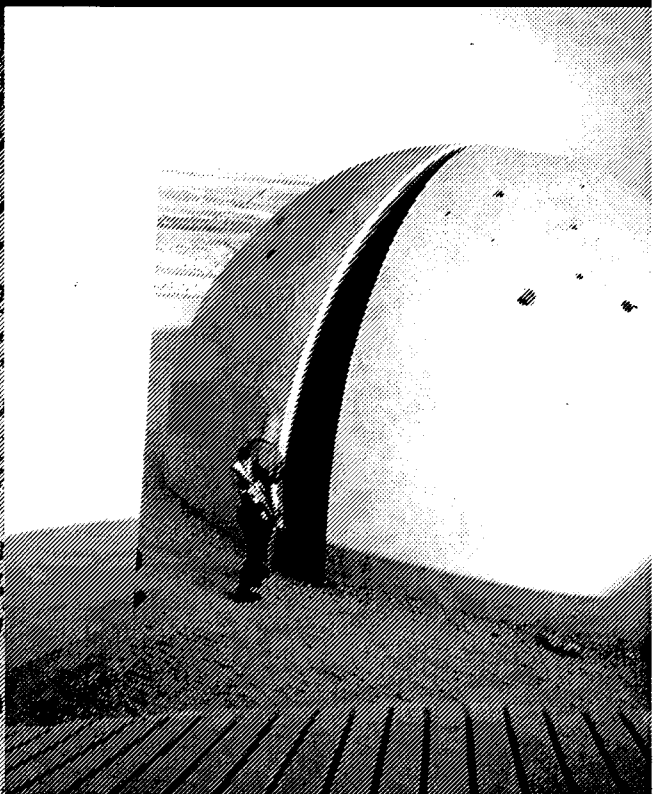
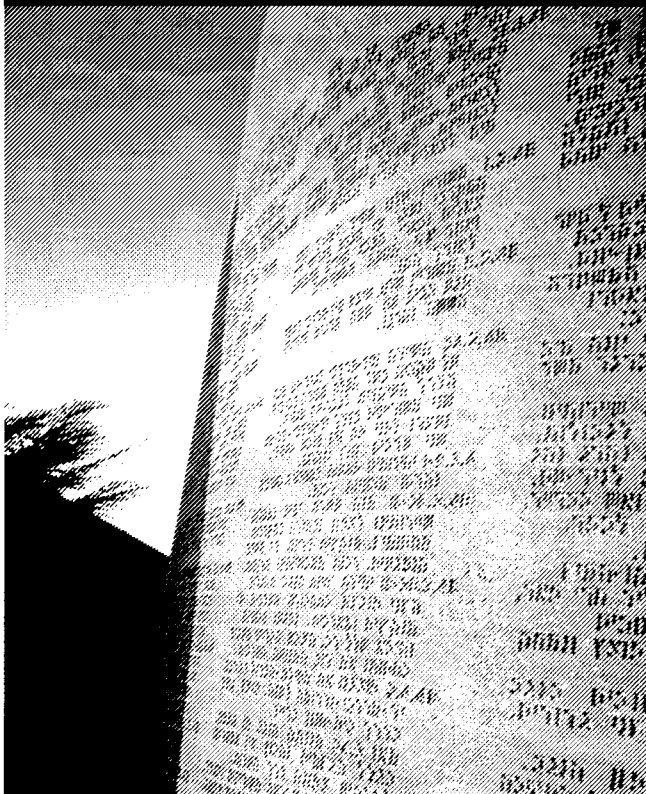
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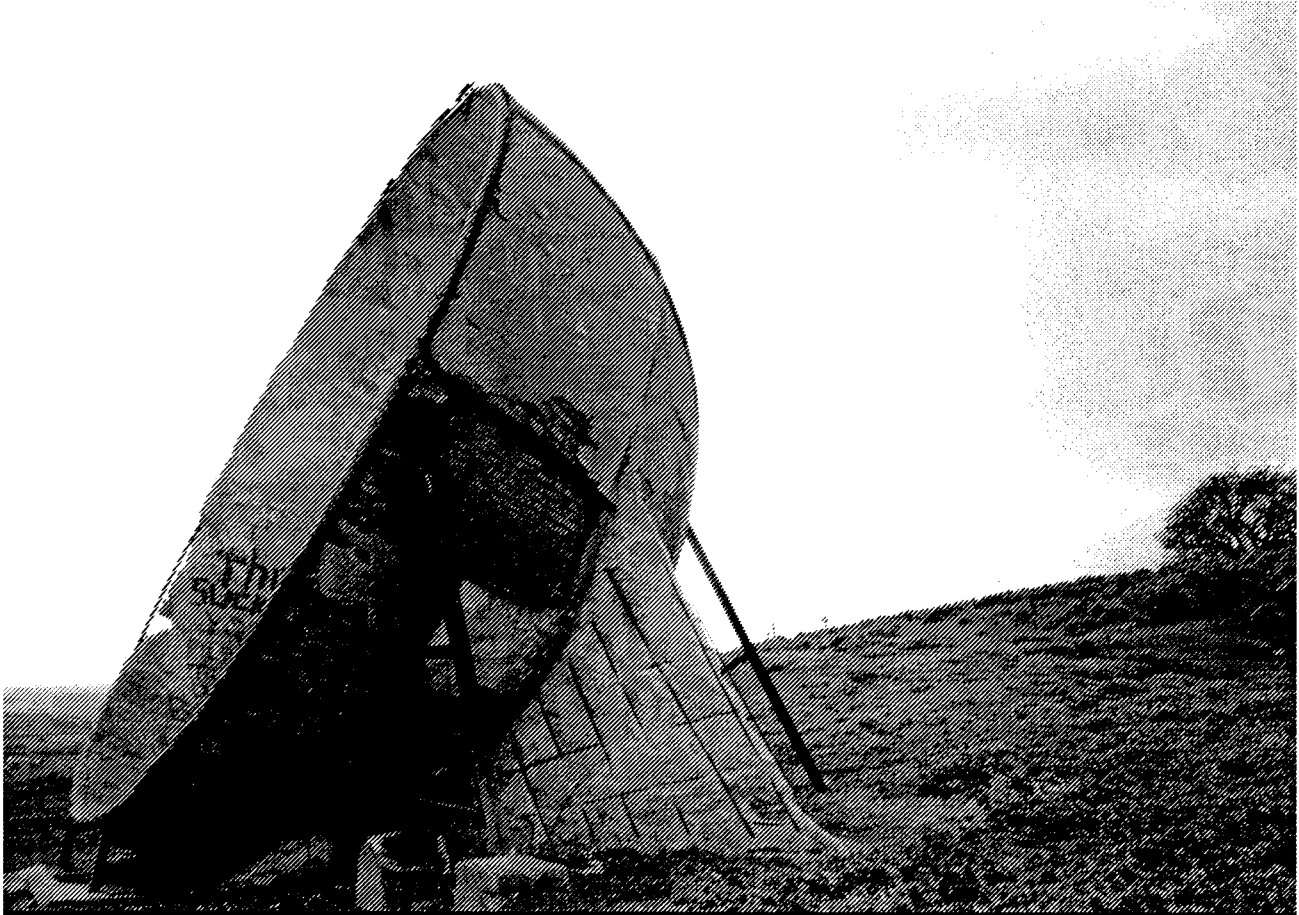
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Paul Virilio (1984) [2]

Nocturne for distant fog horns, propeller blades and explosions

Audience responses to low frequency sound-installations and performances suggest that many people instinctively associate booming, droning, roaring and rumbling sounds with dreams and also with war. Apparently Goethe believed true poetry lies not in the provision of authentically new experiences, but in stimulating the recollection of memories which would otherwise remain forgotten. There are few more poignant surprises than to be prompted to recover people, moments or sense-memories from the depths of the distant past.

Hyperacuity in darkness (hyper-sensitivity of hearing, similar to the well-known audiological effects of blindness), the tendency of damp night air to absorb high frequencies and favour the long-distance propagation of low frequency sounds, and dramatic reductions in the masking effects of ambient noise at night all conspire to implant abyssal bass and infrasounds deep into subconscious memories of hypnagogic states and dreams.

I have always been fascinated by very deep sounds – perhaps because during childhood I often drifted-off to sleep to a hypnotic soundtrack composed by the propellers of Hercules transporters

planes circling the aerodrome at RAF Lyneham, the aeronautical goods depot of the MOD – formative sense-memories encoded by the restless nocturnal traffic of constant preparedness for war.

In London, in the early 70s, now and then the night's sky still resonated with the deep wail of fog-horns aboard the last few merchantmen working the river Thames. In later life the sheer face of the cliff above Brighton station deflected sound upwards, with the effect that when living just back from the cliff-edge the to-and-fro of mail-wagons in the small-hours was often felt rather than heard, oscillations rumbling-up through the ground itself, into the foundations of the house, gently rocking the hillside, resonating the walls of my room. It was both in and as a tribute to this atmosphere that the Low Level Urban Funk Campaign's *Before the Parachute Opens* and *Ghost Limbs* were 'composed' for a broadcast on local radio... “thousands of tiny sense-memories sprinkled on a dark lake of rising sound”. A live version of *Ghost...* (a track subsequently released as *Untitled* by *Anonymous* on disk 2 of *Disinformation's Antiphony* remix CD set) was described by a member of its audience as “like walking into a dream”.

Similarly, but at a very much deeper level of encoding, real danger triggers the so-called fight-or-flight reflexes which place the autonomic nervous system on full-alert, flooding the body with adrenaline, hypersensitizing the senses, and dramatically extending subjective perceptions of time. As Barry Convex says in David Cronenberg's classic *Videodrome*, “something to do with the effects of exposure to violence on the nervous system... opens up receptors in the brain and the spine”. During the WW2 nocturnal Blackout procedures were tantamount to a policy of compulsory mass hyperacusis. Venturing outdoors at night, particularly the urban



of the complimentary arts of simulation and dissimulation;

population, already hypersensitized by fear, found their hearing heightened still further by immersion in levels of darkness which were unprecedented since the introduction of street-lighting.

The basic hypothesis here is that the experience of defensively listening, consciously and unconsciously, for the dull-thud of explosions, the whistle of rockets and bombs and the roar of planes is the mechanism by which such autonomic states encode, at a fundamental neurological level, as conditioned, reflexive responses to ambient low frequency sounds. These high states of arousal are necessarily those in which individuals are most receptive to sense-data. These responses are also culturally transmissible – primarily through the medium of cinema.

It is worth noting that extreme sensitivity to sound (of the exact sort idealised by the composer John Cage) is not only a state of heightened aesthetic awareness, but also a recognised medical condition, often associated with debilitating phonophobia and the onset of conditioned tinnitus – and during the war advertisements in *Picture Post* magazine suggest there was a roaring trade in sedatives, not only for people but also for household pets.

The Air Defence Experimental Establishment

"The sound of the Zeppelin's engines was so fine, and its voyage through the stars so enchanting, that I positively caught myself hoping next night that there would be another raid." George Bernard Shaw (1916) [3]

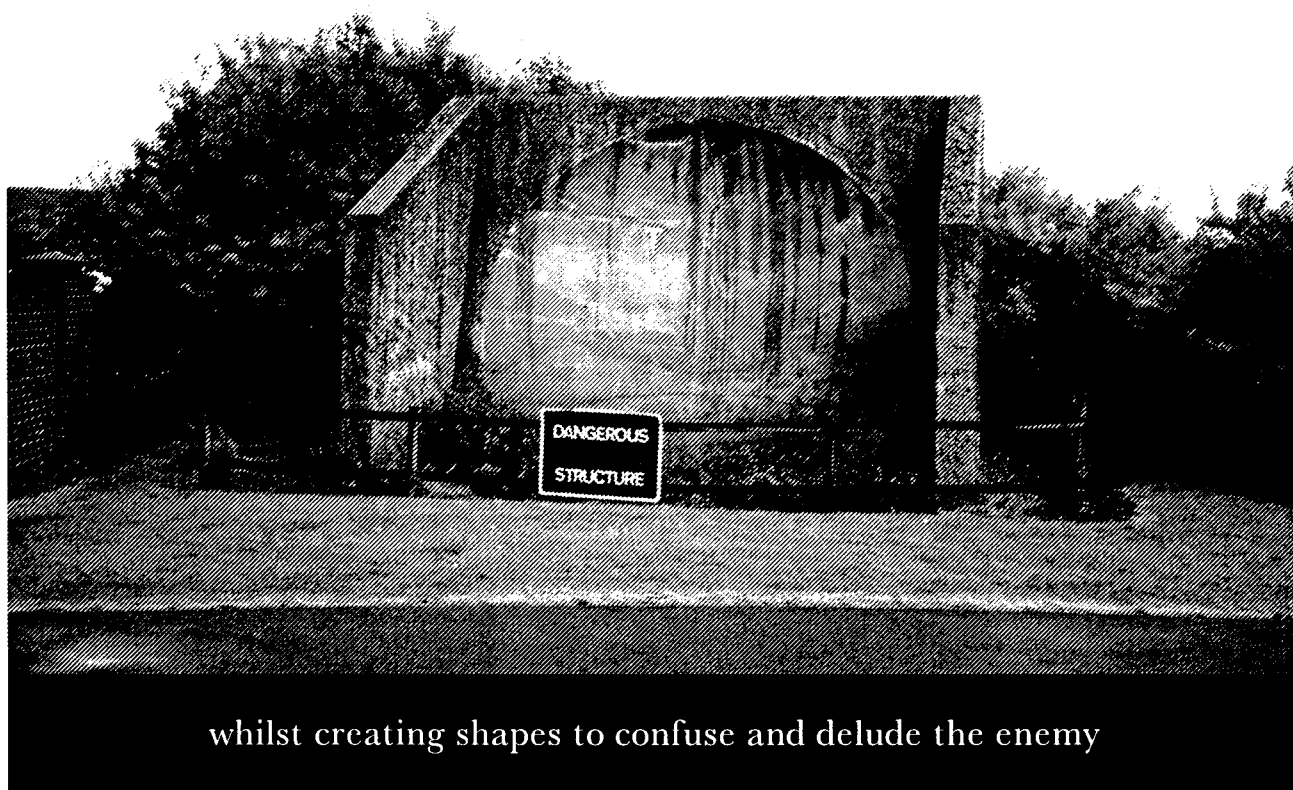
In the light of this hypothesis it seems natural that sound should be an ideal medium for abstract representations of war – so it is

not surprising that some of its greatest sculptural representations rely heavily on the effects of sound. My interest in these sculptures originally stemmed from recognising the cultural primacy of visual images over intellectual concepts ("people eat with their eyes", "a picture speaks 1,000 words") and therefore the commercial necessity and challenge of finding visual analogues which could encapsulate and advertise the Disinformation brand-name noise repertoire.

The solution was provided by an article by W. Harms in *Shortwave Magazine*, which described a series of massive concrete monoliths which still stand, slowly crumbling into waste-land at a site near Dungeness in Kent. These structures, built in the 1920s and 1930s, formed a primitive experimental early-warning system – several elegant, but extremely austere concave shapes designed to allow the precise triangulation of directional-fixes on the distant sounds of incoming enemy Zeppelins, aircraft and ships.

These shapes rise up out of the Kentish shingle like the strange ceremonial relics of a dead civilisation or unknown tribal culture (and if you consider military R&D as an anthropological entity as well as a purely technical enterprise, then perhaps this interpretation is not as wild as it seems). Appearing alongside a picture of the abandoned Church of St. Giles in the village of Imber (the ghost-town on the tank-ranges of Salisbury Plain) and digital artwork representing the anthropomorphic slang of the RAF, the sound mirrors provided photographer Julian Hills with his Disinformation 'remix' for *Antiphony*.

Extensive librature and archive research has so far uncovered a total of seventeen mirrors, sixteen on the Kent and Yorkshire coasts.



whilst creating shapes to confuse and delude the enemy

and one at a site in Malta (which, according to *Casemate* magazine, is "approached through a slurry of cow muck and dead chickens"). Ten of these can still be visited today, one is buried, two have collapsed, while there are four more mirrors whose status remains, from my point of view, unknown. Architecturally many of the sound mirrors look as though they could have been designed yesterday, and it is on close inspection that they their true state of distress is revealed. It is hard not to be impressed by this geometry – the striking contrasts between elegant, concave parabolas and their rough textures, their impressive solidity and substantial physical forms.

Everybody loves a ruin, and, viewing obsolete military architecture from the vantage point of the close of this brutal century, the long-term structural shortcomings of reinforced concrete have manufactured relics which resonate across a timescale that tangibly connects to people's lives. The anthropomorphic connotations of such structures make them appropriate physical counterparts for a repertoire of noise... ears sculpted in uncompromising concrete and steel. War itself expresses mankind's darkest spiritual aspirations, and, as a sculptural genre, the technological products of military R&D represent their reflexive artistic expression.

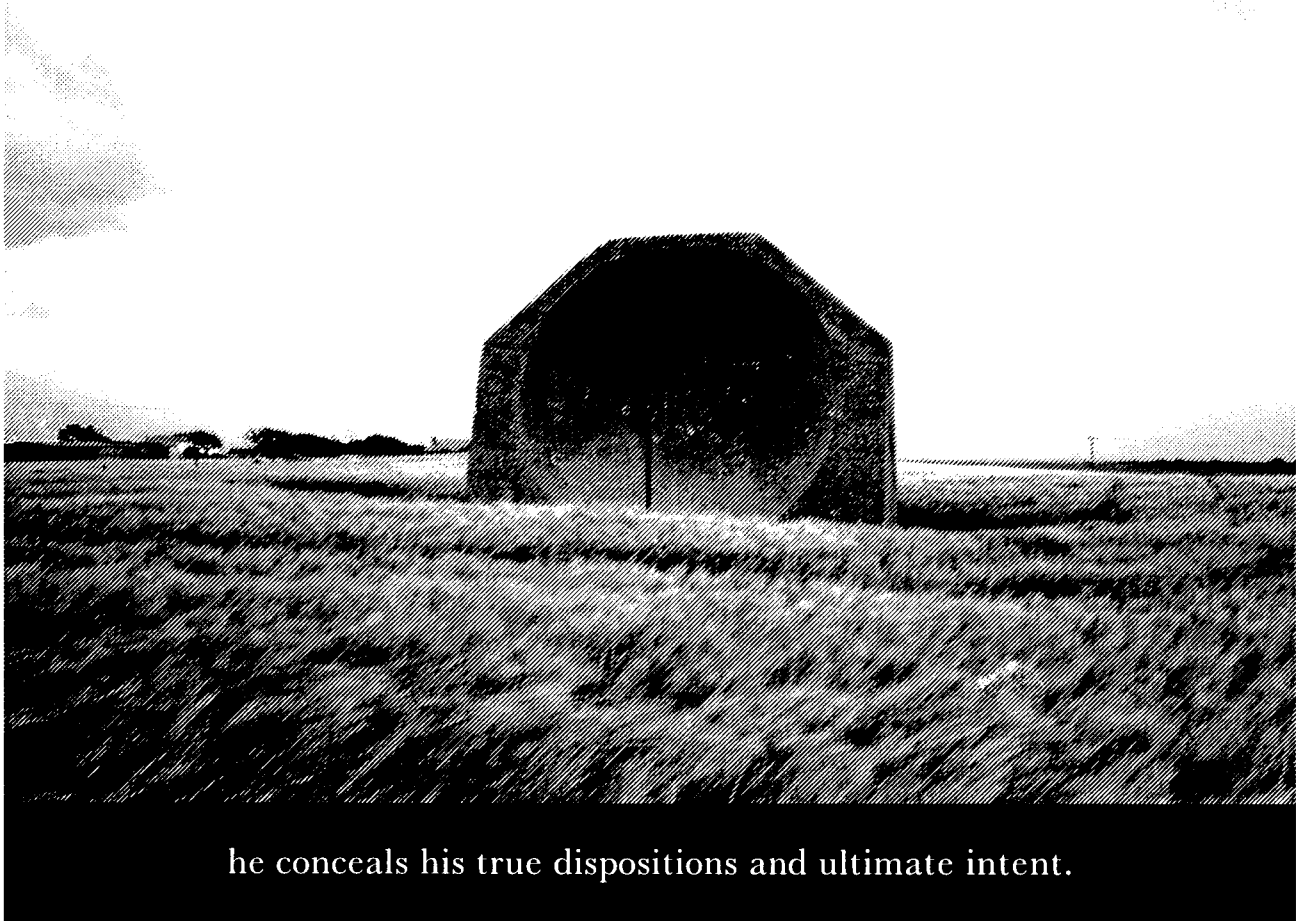
Today much contemporary architecture monumentalises little more than sad, but perhaps historically inevitable victories of style over content, in strict conformity with the needs of the broader marketplace. Empty mental space is parodied in the pale, fashionable, acoustically harsh concrete of uncomfortable designer bars, clubs and restaurants – architecture designed to look good and sound awful, disregarding millennia of accumulated acoustics expertise. In marked contrast these desolate sites resonate with the fears of close ancestors – looking out over the sea, in dread anticipation

of the innovative unknowns of an apocalypse of air bombardment, which, at the time of their construction, was the latest technical atrocity in the pandemic mechanisation of violence to haunt the public imagination.

Approaching the largest mirror site is like walking into a scene from Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* – a sensation amplified by the barbed-wire, the apparently ubiquitous dead animals, and the ominous presence of the nuclear power station nearby. Sadly most of the Kentish mirrors have fallen prey to vandalism and neglect (amazingly a small part of the damage seems to have been committed by 'sound artists' – the name and symbol of a noise fanzine are scratched into the back of the 200 foot Sentry mirror).

Plans to extend the UK sound-mirror network and build similar chains for defending the colonies of Aden, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Malta and Singapore were shelved in 1939 when the mirrors were rendered obsolete by Robert Watson-Watt's superior radio-detection-and-ranging programme, Radar. Nonetheless their architects – the (so far) mysterious Professor Mather, the RAF Air Defence Experimental Establishment, and in particular its Commander W.S. Tucker have bequeathed an important legacy to modern sculpture – a potent vernacular Futurism.

Both in terms of physical and psychological presence the mirrors surpass virtually everything with which they can be compared. They easily compete with sculptures by ADEE contemporaries such as Henry Moore and Jacob Epstein, and anticipate works by Anish Kapoor and Dani Karavan by decades. However where Karavan's work, as we will see in a moment, suggests he has a real interest in the creative possibilities of architectural acoustics, in contrast when



he conceals his true dispositions and ultimate intent.

I tried to listen to Anish Kapoor's parabolas I was nearly thrown out of the gallery in which he was exhibiting.

Writing in a recent English Heritage report John Schofield noted that military archaeology (the emergent field pioneered by the philosopher Paul Virilio, the avant-garde caving organisation Subterranea Britannica, the Fortress Study Group, the Centre for the Conservation of Defence Electronics and the Defence of Britain Project) is often more popular among the general public than it is among professional archaeologists. Apparently the observation that 20th century military structures "look black and white, even in colour" is representative of professional opinion. However it seems that English Heritage are nonetheless responding enthusiastically to the urgent challenge of their preservation, prompted both by increasing public enthusiasm and the accelerating decay and demolition of important historical sites.

The Monument to the Palmach Negev Brigades

"So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets; and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword." Joshua 6. v. 20-21.

Returning to a theme touched-on earlier in this article, the initial mirror visit (the first of several works-outings with members of People Like Us, ECM323, Tun[k] Systems and film-maker

Barry Hale) immediately sparked the vivid recollection of a childhood experience in the Negev Desert in Israel. Many years ago my family went on an excursion to the *Andarta Memorial*, an extraordinary complex of concrete sculptures also known as the *Monument to the Palmach Negev Brigades*. Caroline Grigson's photographs of this site make up the introductory page of this supplement. This visit left a deep impression, and this recollection prompted some research into this striking architectural project.

This cluster of sculptures was designed by the artist Dani Karavan and completed in 1968, and nothing I have ever seen literalises Friedrich Schelling's concept of architecture as "frozen music" more completely or coherently. Looking at the largest, best-known mirror site made the Israeli monument appear as the explicit expression of an artistic impulse sublimated in the English designs. The tactical purpose of the UK sound mirrors, which were designed as an early-warning system to enable the RAF to glimpse a few minutes into the future, vindicates the choice of acoustics as a medium for symbolising memories. Dani Karavan's work was designed to offer its visitors a glimpse into Israel's past – and does so using a complex system to symbolise military action by the Palmach (striking brigades) in taking the town of Be'erseheba from the Egyptian army during the war of independence in 1948, and as a memorial to the soldiers who died.

The echo inside the monument's dome, the bird-song echoing inside the tower, the wail of stylised bullet-holes in the dome and tower singing in the arid wind, and footsteps appearing to change pitch in the passage in front of the dome are all sounds produced or modified passively by the structures themselves. These 'walls of sound' seem to recall potent symbols of Jewish culture.



Moving as intangibly as a ghost in the starlight, he is obscure, inaudible.

Jerusalem's Wailing Wall (or Western Wall), that vast remnant of the great temple of King David, divides the sacred sites of Judaism and Islam by inches (and it has recently been revealed that behind the wall is a network of passages which are alleged to contain the site of Creation itself). Readers may recall the Biblical story of the battle of Jericho, when the blast of trumpets brought the walls of the besieged city crashing down.

The mathematics of the eerie "echelon" effect in the passage are described in detail by Alexander Wood [4]. This effect occurs when a sharp impulse reverberates between acoustically-reflective planes, with these surfaces placed sufficiently close that the frequency of reflection equals that of, and gives rise to, a musical note (whose frequency is equal to the speed of sound divided by the distance between the two reflectors). Hence the click of footsteps between two hard, smooth, flat walls produces notes which rise in pitch if the gap between the two walls tapers inwards. Similarly, interpreting the acoustics of the monument's dome, as implied earlier it can be said that under certain circumstances the words "echo" and "memory" are interchangeable. However, it has to be admitted that my interpretations of these effects are speculative, and based on observation rather than documentary proof.

The memorial features symbolic representations of a stronghold, based on a complex of battlefield trenches; a Palmach tent; a well, an aqueduct, and an Acacia tree (presumably representing the irrigation and successful cultivation of the desert by Jewish settlers); the passage which aligns with the slot of the aqueduct; the dome of the memorial candle; the courtyard of the dome; an underground shelter; the wall of the reconnaissance fighters; a bird (meaning unknown); the tower, representing the watch-towers and water

towers common in the early Zionist settlements; and a snake, cut into slices to symbolise the defeated enemy; a memorial garden; excerpts from the war diaries of the Palmach and poems by Chaim Goori and Nathan Shakkan impressed into concrete walls; and the "square of operations" in which maps of the battle are drawn into concrete sheets.

- [1] Brigadier-General Samuel B. Griffith, translator, introduction to Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Oxford University Press, 1965
- [2] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema*, Verso, 1989
- [3] Quoted in Jay Winter and Blaine Baggett, *1914-18*, BBC, 1996
- [4] Alexander Wood, *Acoustics*, Blackie, 1940

Text and sound mirror photographs © Joe Banks 1997
Andarta Memorial photographs © Caroline Grigson 1997

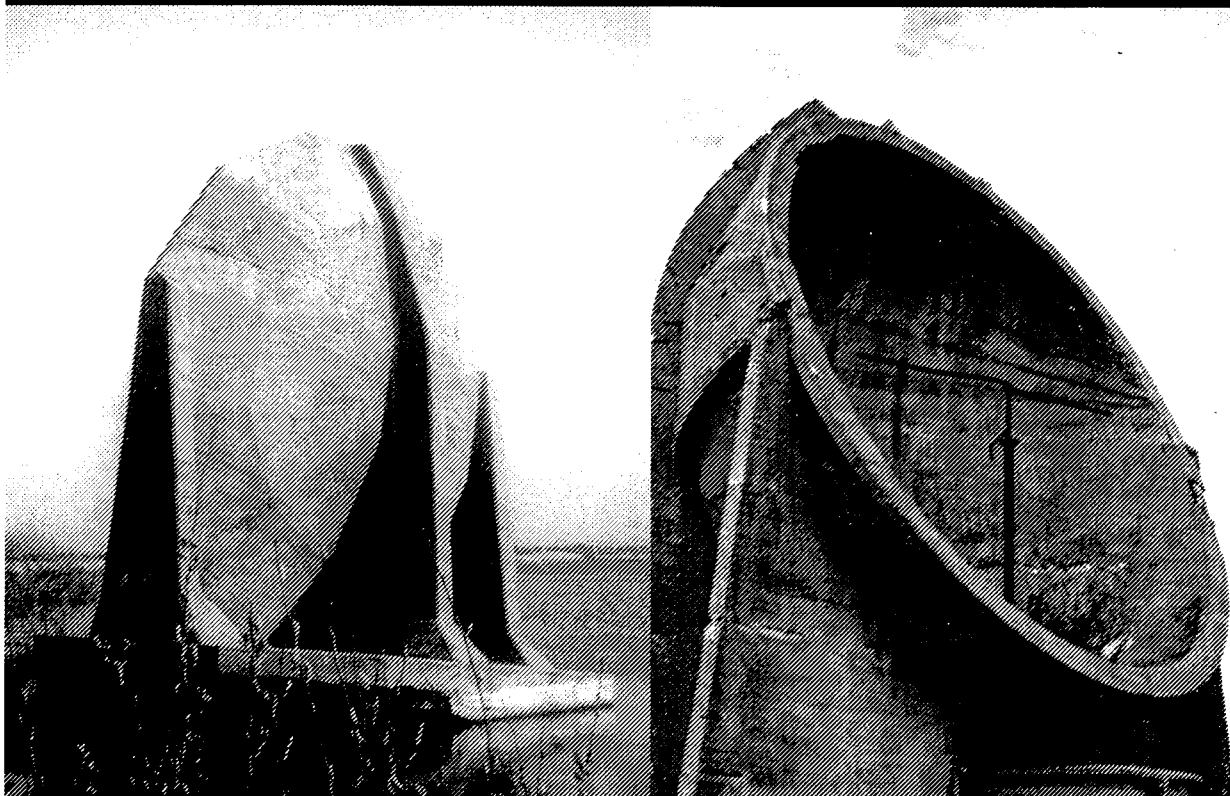
Many thanks to Vicki Bennett, Casemate Magazine, Paddy Collins, Professor Isaac Gilead, Barry Hale, Julian Hills, Peter Hodgkinson, the Jewish Arts Resource Centre, Drew Mulholland, the Negev Museum, Barry Nichols, Adrian Phillips, Ed Pinsent, Mathew Riley, and Chris Watson for their encouragement, information and help.

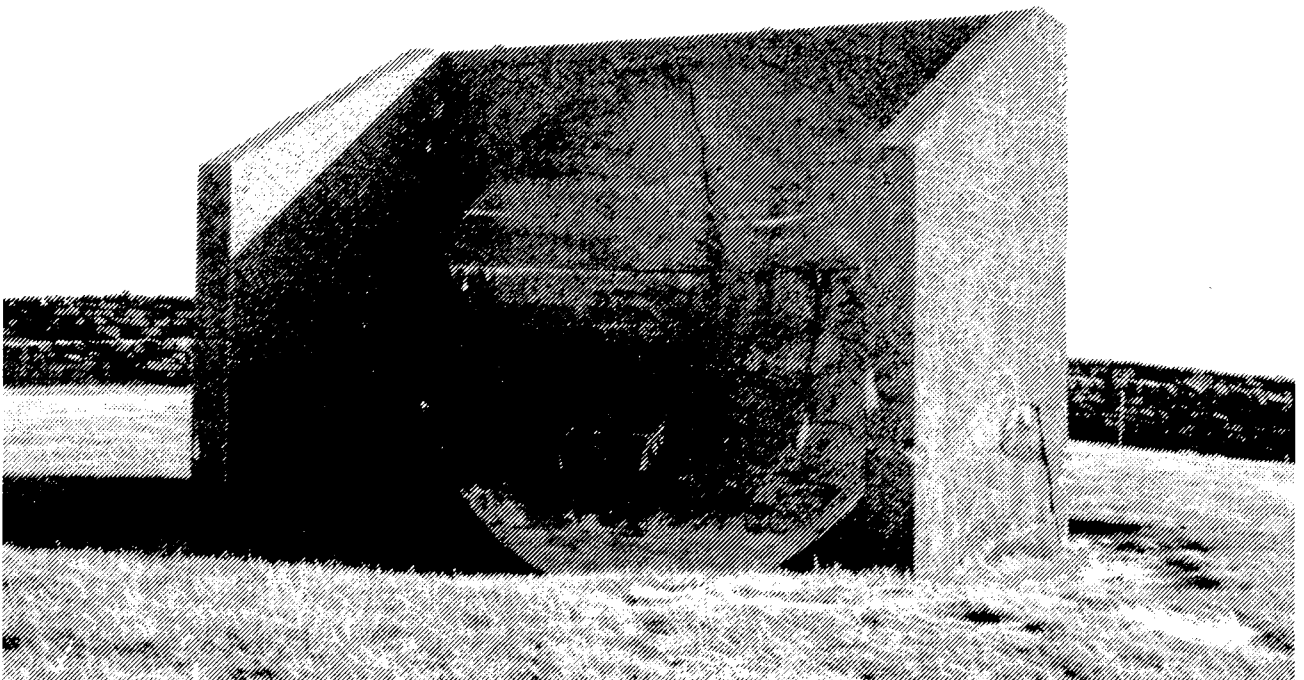
Barry Hale's *Antiphony Video Supplement* has been shown at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig, the 121 Centre, the Royal College of Art, at *National Grid NO5608* in the underground nuclear warfare command centre near Anstruther, on board MS Stubnitz in Stockholm, at the David Land Arts Centre in Brighton, the Arthouse, the Vox in Chemnitz and at Sonar in Barcelona.

Disinformation products are available from These Records on 0171 587 5549 and Source Research on 0141 633 5984.



His primary target is the mind of the opposing commander;





SOUNDBOMBING

New Hip-Hop and Rap CDs reviewed by WAR ARROW



Eminem

The Slim Shady LP
AFTERMATH /
INTERSCOPE RECORDS
INTD-90287 (1998)

It seems sadly appropriate that even as I write, Eminem's 'My Name Is...' is at number two in the pop hit parade, held away from the top slot by a trouser-selling yellow puppet. Such ludicrous ignominy could easily slot in next to other tales of wacky injustice on this album. Eminem, or 'controversial white rapper Eminem' as a rather lazy press has come to know him, first came to my attention on some dreary BBC news channel entertainment dump aired at peak viewing time 4.30 am. Some clueless self-styled 'entertainment journalist' was pontificating on the laddie's credibility. *Blah blah Vanilla Ice blah blah controversial lyrics* and so on. However, we're probably on safe ground, the goatee-bearded tool continued, because Eminem is of course the protégé of Dr Dre who was in that controversial rap group Public Enemy.

Actually Dre was in N.W.A., which is hardly obscure information known only within the inner sanctums of hip-hop, but that's about as close to relevance or accuracy that the press has thus far managed to get when dealing with Eminem. Apart from the fact that white folks are not completely unknown within hip-hop (White Dawg, Molotov, El-P, Everlast, 3rd Bass, Milkbone and so on) it only seems to be those with no interest in the genre that bang on about Eminem's 'authenticity', and honestly, who really gives a fuck what *The Guardian's* arts correspondent thinks? Eminem is only controversial for the same reasons that N.W.A. were. After all if a few gangstas listen to this stuff and start taking pot shots at each other, who cares, but as soon as white suburban America, you know, OUR kids, catch on - Wooah! Call out the National Guard. Anyone who's seriously offended by Eminem should probably be reacting in the same way to *The Simpsons*, or any film made after 1950. Sure, there's

guns and hos and niggaz and bitches. That's hip-hop. It's sometimes aggressive and violent because that's how society often behaves.

So. Is Eminem any good? Hell, yes. The fact the Dr Dre, Snoop Dogg and Missy Elliott, to name but three, have all chosen of their own free will to work with him speaks volumes, and more than settles clueless debates about 'authenticity'. As a shy and scrawny white kid from Detroit, his first forays into the world of rap were beset by more than the usual quota of obstacles; and lesser talents would not have lasted this long, let alone broken through into the mainstream. Eminem raps with the ferocity of the nutter on the bus and the manic desperation of one who has run three miles home for a sorely-needed poo, only to remember the front door keys are still in the pocket of a different pair of trousers. He fires out rhymes within rhymes and multiple puns which trip over each other before your brain has fully digested even the first part of the message, and just when you've nearly got into the rhythm of this sensory overload, he delivers a quadruple whammy and we're back to square one with our brains dripping out of our ears, and a team of surgeons fighting to sew our sides back together. *Slim Shady*, named for the persona Eminem takes on

throughout this album, isn't a novelty record, or even (shudder) a comedy record, but a lot of it is very funny.

Having said that, it's more than a one-dimensional gag-fest. As ex-trailer trash myself, I can identify with the tales of crap badly-paid flunky jobs, bad food, bad relationships, minimal prospects of things getting better, and a dysfunctional upbringing. Before the violins start, even during grimmer moments, he exudes razor sharp wit.

The music and production chores alternate between Dre, and the team of Marky and Jeff Bass. Of these, Dre has the edge but it's a close run race. The stumbling clunky beats lurch along in a sometimes drunken fashion as the main feature raps in and out of the tracks like a rain-coated bra thief fleeing the pursuing army of store detectives. The subject matter of frustrated hold-ups, failed attempts to get famous, drug overdose and dumping your girlfriend's body off the end of a pier, is reassessed on the final track 'Still Don't Give A Fuck'. In tones reserved for adults explaining important and complicated facts of life to small children, Eminem reassures us all that he's never shot, stabbed, killed, or raped anyone, least of all his ex-girlfriend who is alive, well and looking after their cute baby daughter, whose picture

appears on the cover, and whom Eminem would clearly die for before letting any harm come to her. It's a pity that this won't convince the moral crusaders who blame rap for violence, debauchery, world famine and global warming, but as Eminem would say - fuck 'em. In a world like this, the real good guys are standing at the back of the class trying hard not to laugh.



Foxy Brown

Chyna Doll
DEF JAM / VIOLATOR
RECORDS 558 033-2 (1999)

As is probably obvious, this is NOT a musical outing by Pam Grier's big screen alter ego, rather it is the second album by Inga Marchand, the 19 year-old protégé of Jay-Z, he of 'Hard Knock Life' notoriety. 1997's *III Na Na* still stands as a fine debut, though with some teething problems, none of which have been repeated on *Chyna Doll*. Like wine, Foxy has improved with the passing of time, some say only because she's half-inched some of Lil' Kim's Brooklyn-brewed grunts and groans, but whether true or not (and it's debatable, as Foxy is herself a Brooklyn native), her rapping is sharper and cleaner. I use the latter adjective to indicate a certain polish, by the way, not a sudden reluctance to use rude words. In fact, with regard to fluent and vividly illustrative oathery, I suspect some sort of record may have been broken here, and I'm surprised that the 'Parental Guidance' sticker didn't take up the whole cover. Not that this bothers me personally. It's something of a pleasure to have the air of my living room turned blue with such poise and style. Some rappers screech and whine, whilst others seem to mumble into the ether without any regard for rhythm or flow. Foxy's pissed-off drawl is swiftly evolving into a distinctive and effective complement to the sparse but razor-sharp beats over which she does her thang.

Yes, the music. Choppy, electronic and minimal, it's sort



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of like early John Carpenter having a seizure. On more extreme examples like '4-5-6' and 'Ride (Down South)' the vocal carries the rhythm with clearer definition than the mutilated stuttery backdrop. There's the customary borrowed samples of course, notably on 'I Can't' (also featuring Total) which transform a slice of George Michael's orange driveline into a cut I'd actually bother to cross the road for. The noteworthy tracks are many, in fact they take up most of the album. To pick a few at random, 'Bonnie and Clyde Part II' sees Foxy and Jay-Z managing to outgangsta each other, both at the same time if you'll forgive the contradiction, over a backing that is not so much a passage of music as the sound of a drum machine and a sampler getting it on in the Barry White sense. 'B.W.A.' is probably my own personal desert island disc of the set. Here Foxy is joined by Gangsta Boo and the unstoppable Mia X for a gal-orientated remake of N.W.A.'s 'Real Niggaz Don't Die', which manages to piss torrents over the original, and hints at what Ozzy Osborne might sound like if he was young, female and black. It would make an absolutely MURDEROUS single if such a possibility was likely, given the irrepressibly catchy chorus of 'I'm a muthafuckin' bitch!' As an anthem to female empowerment (and all that...mutter mumble) it drops cobalt bombs on all that sensitive campfire stuff...and Huggy blummin' Bear you can just forget about right here and now, if you hadn't already.

In days of yore I considered most female rappers a bit weak and whiney. Perhaps I was wrong, or perhaps some really were as bad as I remember. Whatever the case may be, this particular prejudice was eventually carted off to State Pen with multiple life

sentences and no chance of parole. Foxy Brown's just thrown away the key. Chyna Doll will drive-by its way into your heart.



Various Artists *Straight Outta Compton - 10th Anniversary Tribute*

**PRIORITY RECORDS
CDPTY 163 7243 8 46881 2 7
(1998)**

The idea of covering an entire album seems a little eccentric at the very least, although Laibach must be given credit for a convincingly stern interpretation of The Beatles' *Let It Be*. But a rap album?

The greatest strength of hip-hop is its lyrical content. Hairy geetargh rock with pitiful lyrics can usually stand on the strength of brute force and momentum, or interesting use of tambourine during the bridge, but rappers with no lyrical ability will only ever ruin a good beat. Which is why it's such an oddball thing to do, covering an entire N.W.A. album. It's almost like covering a spoken word record - like Bill Hicks doing a version of Lenny Bruce's *Live at Carnegie Hall*.

Anyway. It's ten years since the debut album by 'the world's most dangerous group' irrevocably changed the face of hip-hop. To commemorate the occasion the artists present have been gathered in tribute. Most, like Mack 10 and Compton's Most Wanted, are contemporaries and associates of N.W.A. from in and around LA, but there's a few out of town boys as well, notably half of New York's Terror Squad (Fat Joe, Big Pun, Cuban Link) and No Limit soldiers C-Murder and Silk



the Shocker. It's no less than an assemblage of hip-hop's scariest as of 1999. Will Smith and Lauryn Hill seem to have been overlooked. Guffaw.

The music remains for the most part faithful to the originals, with a few deft modern touches. Lyrically it's still the same explosive brilliance of ten years ago, bar the odd customisation made to avoid the potential lunacy of Mr Mike singing about what it's like being Ice Cube. Obviously there's no way this could ever surpass the original although many a well-aimed shot is taken, notably by Beats By The Pound who provide a radically remodelled version of 'Gangsta Gangsta' for the distinctive talents of Snoop Dogg and C-Murder. When guesting on other people's albums these two never fail to shine with equal brilliance and they bring moody hoodlum magic to all they touch, so it's a real treat to hear them together on such a fundamentally classic number. I'd buy a Morrissey record if C-Murder popped in to drop a few lines.

Meaty though it is, the greatest function of this collection is to serve as a timely reminder of the sheer brilliance of the original album, and what a groundbreaking act were N.W.A. at their peak. The whole gangsta thing is poorly understood, because people are often too quick to make a condemnation based on the flimsiest of half-truths, and it gets boring having to explain the facts to someone who probably isn't even that interested. This is illustrated well by the tedious regularity with which Public Enemy's deeply humourless *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back* crops up in all these pre-millennial fave album lists alongside Neil Young, The Smiths, and all the other usual suspects. It's probably the only hip-hop record a great number of people have heard, which of course isn't a crime, and Public Enemy have had their moments (notably 'Bring The Noise') but ultimately that album is as one-dimensional as the overused saxophone squeal that saturates its grooves. The great injustice of all this is that *Straight Outta Compton*, which is as

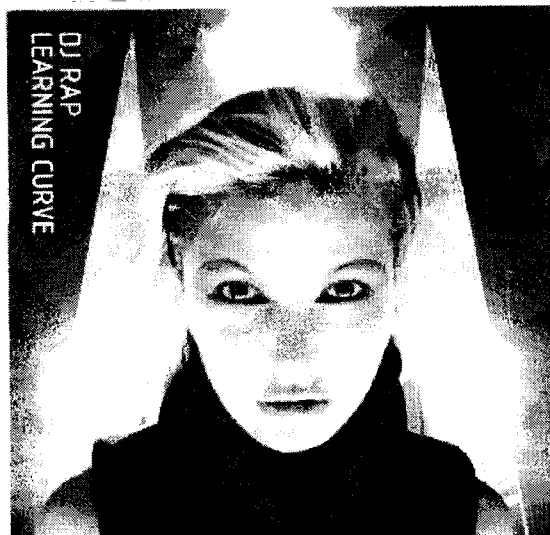
important to the whole hip-hop genre as *Never Mind The Bollocks* was to rock music, is only presently available in the UK as an overpriced and barely obtainable import! Hopefully this celebration will serve to elevate Ice Cube, Ren, Dre, Yella and the sadly missed Eazy E, to the legendary status which is most certainly their due.



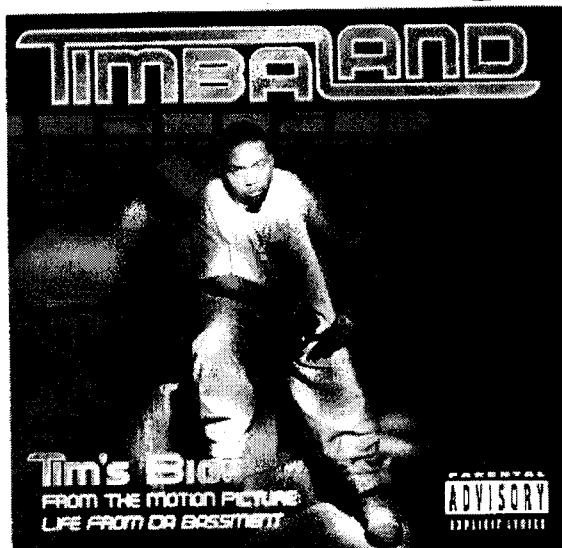
DJ Rap *Learning Curve HIGHER GROUND HIGHCD (1999)*

A friend recently implored me to buy a copy of rubbish lads' mag *Maxim* on the strength that it featured photos of himself acting the goat to illustrate one of the many substance-free articles. Gritting my teeth and with a face far redder than is normal when purchasing pornography, I sauntered out of the newsagent praying that my path would not be crossed by any familiar faces. Later, having derived mild amusement from images of my pal gurning away like a good 'un, I noticed the rag purported to contain something on DJ Rap. My spirits lifted until eventually finding, somewhere in the region of page 567, herself reclining suggestively around a minuscule article the thrust of which was 'I may be a famous DJ but I enjoy wearing heels and stockings as much as the next girl'. Oh for goodness sake! Still, more fool me for expecting anything else within such shabby pages. A friend now informs me that Rap used to appear regularly on the third page of a certain crap newspaper, and rather unusually this was around the time when her early groundbreaking jungle platters first started to attract attention in clubs. Over the last couple of years Rap's public profile has loomed ever larger and her underground status has diminished accordingly, not least because she keeps doing songs, complete with choruses and all the pop trimmings.

So, dutifully I bought this, mindful of the possibility that a trip to the record and tape exchange could be a potential eventuality. An eventuality that never came to



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be, because *Learning Curve* is a scorcher. True, this time she's singing songs as well as giving the drum machine a nervous breakdown, but it turns out that she has a fine evocative voice, and *Learning Curve* remains true to her innovative beginnings without simply repeating them in time to chirpy audio fluff. It may seem an odd comparison, but what immediately springs to mind is the recent collaboration between Madonna and William Orbit. While pretty good for Madonna, both 'Ray of Light' and especially 'Drowned World' sound like flat monochrome shadows of the deep blue dimensions through which Rap swims on this album. But even with lucidly dreamt guitars, breathy harmonies and the stadium rock finale of 'You Get Around', there's no mistaking this for anything other than drum and bass, although of a powerful new mutant strain. Much of this still send shivers up the spine even after inoculation by repeated plays. How the hell does she do it? The way the choruses seem to turn inside out as they drip down your back like ice cubes, it's certainly the closest musical analogy of the weird cold euphoria induced by disco biscuits. Pardon my seemingly wanton enthusiasm, but this has GOT to be an impossible act to follow.



Various Artists

Rawkus Presents Soundbombing II RAWKUS P250069 (1999)

Like the sad little collector that I am, I bought this on the strength of the Eminem track, and whilst initially experiencing a little disorientation, found the rest of it really creeps up on you something rotten. Amongst the

other contributors are Sadat X, Mos Def, Pharoahe Monch, Q-Tip and a veritable cast of thousands. Hip-hop, or at least my own tiny corner of that universe, seems to have moved on from scratching in recent years, so it's a pleasant surprise to hear that the twin decks haven't completely lost out to the sampler. In fact the two are often combined on this compilation to vertiginous effect, with stuttery scratches mangling through samplers into something that almost teeters over into fast edit chaos, whilst paradoxically keeping the beats hard, deep and regular. Rawkus as a label is well named, if these folks are any measure. This is very raw, in fact you can almost smell the diesel driving those decks around. Care has also been taken in the lyrical department with nary a weak link in the whole chain.

At the moment the standout cuts seem to be Eminem's 'Any Man' which continues to demonstrate the dexterity of his highly individual style, and Company Flow's 'Patriotism' which scares the living shit out of me. Public Enemy? Pshaw! Having said that, each time I listen some other track previously hidden in the vast seething mix inevitably creeps up and clubs me over the head, much as Medina Green's 'Crosstown Beef' did about five minutes ago. The *Soundbombing* of the title is more than just letters on a CD cover; it's what happens when you put this CD in your machine and press PLAY.



Timbaland

Tim's Bio BLACKGROUND / ATLANTIC 92813.2 (1998)

Oh the sauce! *Tim's Bio*, subtitled so as to suggest being taken from the soundtrack of a

film called *Life From Da Bassment*, which I suspect doesn't exist, opens with the sound of T K Kirkland making his way into the studio whereupon he meets the living God himself, Timbaland, not a place but a lone genius: 'What's so fly is that your stuff is creative...it's different...y'all put a new twist in the game,' while in the other speaker we hear a chorus of hearty acknowledgements from Timbaland, content that the extent of his glory is near infinite. Modesty is not one of Timbaland's strong points, as he admitted in *Vibe* magazine, from behind the wheel of one of his many luxuriously expensive cars, each one the reward for some act of hitherto unprecedented brilliance. For once, such apparently rampant egotism is forgivable. Timbaland is no self-obsessed egomaniac. Nope. If anything, he's just telling it like it is. Timbaland really is THAT good.

The unsettlingly youthful man called Timbaland is a recording artist and producer from the big V.A., that is to say his home state of Virginia. Behind him is a string of platinum sellers. His distinctive brand of down South hip-hop cum slow and sexy R & B is stamped large on albums and singles by Ginuwine, Missy, 702, Aaliyah, Total and others. The Timbaland sound isn't quite like anything else. It's all slow spacious beats lazily punctuated by pregnant pauses, snares clattering away suddenly in the last places you'd expect them to turn up. He's frequently emulated and never bettered, because it's just one of those sounds, like The Fall or even Foetus, that can't be reproduced without the culprit coming over as hopelessly derivative. Only Ignorants have come close, with their remix of KCi and JoJo's 'All My Life', and

then only because their treatment of this ordinarily indistinct song is a perfect forgery of the man from the big V.A. on par with some of those paintings that hang in the National Gallery for half a century before their authenticity is called into question.

Timbaland exists at a tangent from contemporary hip-hop and R & B, just as dub pioneers like Scientist and Mad Professor seemed to have come from a different planet to the more traditional blue beat artists they grew up with. The appeal of his music lies within the tension he plays like an instrument during the lengthy gaps between beats. He builds melodies up around incongruous samples of crashing planes, gurgling babies, twittering birdsong, and then drops in some of the strangest sounding MCs you'll ever hear on disc - Lil' Man (who raps through what sounds like a lungful of helium), Magoo (who isn't named after the cartoon character just for the hell of it, as you'll hear) and Twista (who all but crosses the boundary between speed rapping and just rubbing your lips together whilst blowing). Although the approach suggests similar working methods to that of the sideshow entrepreneur, Timbaland assembles the contents of a freak show and ends up with an opera. The sounds on Timbaland records would, anywhere else, be just plain wrong, yet here they blend in with such natural grace that you're carried away into those slow southern grooves before managing even half of the question 'what the hell is THAT doing on there?' Such mastery has to be the result of hours of careful programming and orchestration, one might think, so you have to be impressed by how live and spontaneous it all



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sounds. The oddly clean and flat production sound gives the impression that a lot of Timbaland's music just sort of fell together one afternoon when a few of the guys came around and ended up messing about in the studio.

This is the second Timbaland album to appear under his own name, and features his regular cast of collaborators. Missy Elliott, Magoo, Aaliyah and Ginuwine are back once again from Timbaland produced solo outings. Among the celebrity newcomers are Jay-Z, Kelly Price and the vocal group Playa. Once again Timbaland seems to have rolled over in his sleep and woken up in the morning to find another album has spontaneously generated itself into the can, another brace of solid gold jams casually fizzling into existence like it's no big deal: 'What Cha Know About This'; 'Put Em On'; 'Fat Rabbit'; 'Who Am I'; the sound of legs breaking in dance halls across the world. Forget all that cybergoth junk, Timbaland is the real sound of things to come. Where that whole screaming synth metal crew got it wrong is in leaving the heart out of their dystopian fantasies, and as Timbaland proves, although the music of tomorrow may at first sound strange and unfamiliar, you KNOW it's got soul.



Various Artists *The N.W.A. Legacy Volume One 1988-1998*

PRIORITY RECORDS
CDPTY 170 7243 8 47091 2
9, 2 X CD (1999)

As the musical family tree on the cover shows, N.W.A. really started something, and a few fruits of this dramatic flowering are collected over these two CDs in the form of solo and collaborative offerings. In fact I can't think of many West coast hustlers of repute who haven't turned up here in one way or another. Obviously there's a couple of N.W.A. numbers from the two albums, and a generous helping of Ice Cube and Dr Dre's respective solo ventures, notably the former's 'Steady Mobbin' with its distinctive mirth-inducing sample 'there goes the neighbourhood!' In addition we get a few of the post-N.W.A. crews like Westside Connection, Da Lench Mob, and Above The Law, and representative tracks from those who have spent time under the mighty wing of Dr Dre - Snoop Dogg, 2Pac, Daz Dillinger and Mack 10.



The music is as varied in mood and timbre as you'd expect from such an eclectic mix. Unsurprisingly there's no shortage of hard-hitting anger, but this is nicely contrasted with material such as Eazy E's irrepressible celebration of himself and his magnificent love truncheon, 'We Want Eazy', and Ice Cube's uptempo summer number 'It Was A Good Day'. The samples range from George Clinton to Nine Inch Nails, so suffice to say there's many colours on this polycarbonate canvas. For those who disapprove of foul language (hard to believe), even you lot are catered for by a medley of cleaned-up N.W.A. hits. Lyrically they're almost completely new, having had dramatic rewrites of the vocal lines, probably because trying to clean up 'Gangsta Gangsta' or 'Dopeman' by just dropping a few naughty words out of the mix would leave you with instrumentals. Oh, those damn potty-mouthed kids! The amount of orally-administered soap that Mrs Cube must've gotten through bringing up wee

Ice could've kept most of Northern Europe spotless for a year, I'll bet you any money you like.

You get lost in this fine world of hard and smooth G-funk. It's funny, angry, funky like you wouldn't believe, jam-packed with righteous truths and some of the most devastating two-liners in the history of rap. I know I'll never get bored of Ice Cube spouting forth 'I'm expressing with my full capability, Now they got me in correctional facilities' on 'Express Yourself', and I doubt I'll live to see the day when I'm able to stop myself waving a fist in the air and chanting along to 'We Want Eazy'.

The only omission in my view is a few representative cuts from The World Class Wreckin' Cru, who apparently were N.W.A.'s previous 'all the ladies say yo' sequinned jumpsuit incarnation - before they discovered attitude. I'm told it was pure cheese, which is perhaps why it's been kind of airbrushed from history. But cheesy or not, this set's



eclectic enough to cope with even a few dabs of embarrassing disaster.



TLC

Fanmail

ARISTA / LAFACE

RECORDS 73008 26055 2

(1998)

With the possible exceptions of The Honeyz and a new Timbaland-plagiarising killer from Destiny's Child, it's all been a bit quiet in R & B since the Brandy album. If you ask me, that is. Their having been responsible for one of the two greatest singles ever made, TLC had me climbing the wall waiting for this to FINALLY come out. What with legal wrangles, management complications, Chilli producing offspring, and Left Eye setting fire to her boyfriend's house with intent to seriously piss him off, it's been a hell of a wait since 1994's *CrazySexyCool*. Especially since that album, whilst containing the greatest song of etc, etc, amongst a few other goodies, was otherwise patchy, and an indecisive follow up to the explosive debut made by *Oooooohhh...On The TLC Tip*. The promo only single of 'Silly Ho', bizarrely edited for radio play so as to omit half of the title, only served to inflame my hunger for Fanmail. 'Silly Ho' promised a lot with T-Boz on her best husky fingers-running-down-your-back vocal form and a track that sounds like it was recorded somewhere in Tokyo towards the end of the 32nd century. The album kept getting held up until finally the day arrived and I was possessed by a single-minded drive to snap it up comparable in severity with De Niro's shooting spree at the end of *Taxi Driver*.

So was it worth the interminable wait, the wear and tear on my running shoes, the cost of replacing all the wallpaper I'd chewed and scraped away? Initially yes, it starts off every bit as good as I'd hoped. TLC seem to have been reborn into some digitally augmented cybernetic version of their former identity, and the contrast of their rich vocal stylings (particularly T-Boz - shiver!) with the cold frenetic rhythm of information cores chattering away at each other, not to mention the appearance of Vic-E, the first synthetic female rapper (we've sure come a long way since Speak N Spell), makes for an electrifying combination. But after the first five or six tracks, it all goes, well, pear-shaped is a bit too strong a simile, but certainly kiwi fruit-shaped. It's that age old

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problem, the pointless syrup-laced ballad. With their inherent pop sensibility TLC never plummet to the murky depths inhabited by yer sequinned luurve junkies, and while some of these songs are okay, they fall a long way short of matching the peaks of the title track, or 'Silly Ho', or 'Automatic', or even the latin flavoured respite from cybersoul, 'Unpretty'.

With Left Eye dropping the odd hint that she may soon take her football home, and forget to renew that TLC membership card, this might turn out to be the final album, which would be a shame. If so, they're going out on a high note, if not a pitch-perfect one. But still, even with only three albums to their name, two of which suffer from a bit of padding, this will always be the group that gave the world 'Waterfalls', 'Ain't 2 Proud 2 Beg', 'Sumthin' Wicked This Way Comes', 'Silly Ho' and one of the funniest phone pranks I've heard (involving Chilli, Puff Daddy, mucho grunting and groaning, and the words 'I want you to pass me a tissue so I can wipe my ass'). Even with the occasionally pointless soul blandathon, that's still good enough.



Missy Misdemeanor Elliott

Da Real World
ELEKTRA RECORDS
7559-62436-6 (1999)

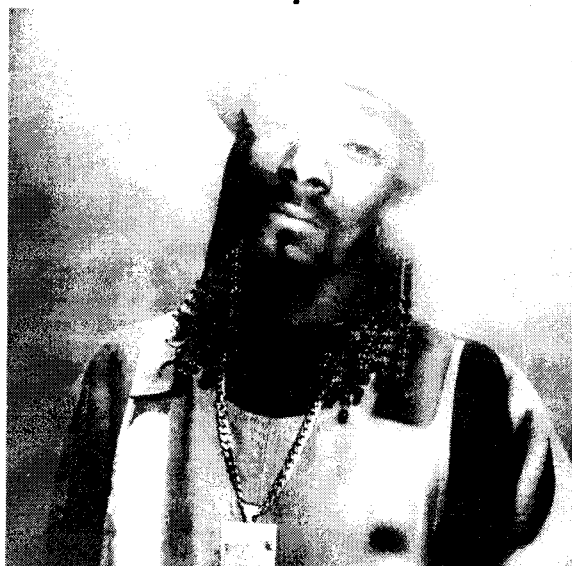
Top Of The Pops. Presented by Gail Porter. Again. Some dirty old man's prepubescent tugging fantasy called (choke) Lolly is bouncing around to 'Viva La Radio'. Gail says her first album is called (choke) *My First Album*. Long pause. Pulls the Tony Hancock face. If I've died, which I accept may be the case, somehow I don't think this is the place with the harps and halos. Only one thing can save me now...(choke)...must find...new...(choke) (cough) Missy...album.

Like Clark Kent suddenly delivered from the influence of Green Kryptonite, my strength, my will to live, slowly returns.

When just a little girl nicknamed 'Pumpkin', growing up in Portsmouth, Virginia, Melissa Elliott always dreamt that a huge limo might pull up outside the school disgorging Janet and Michael Jackson, their having finally decided to visit the kid that wrote to them every week. These days Janet Jackson phones Missy and begs to work with her,

this new world class producer, and Timbaland's long term partner in stutter beats. Missy's first album, *Supa Dupa Fly*, remains unbeatable, and shows that she's very much an equal partner in the creation of the Timbaland sound. It's every bit as good as *Tim's Bio* and *Welcome To Our World*, his earlier joint with Magoo. The focus is slightly different, being from a female perspective, but it's still packed to the hilt with those slow warm beats and suggestive pauses. And, to get to the point, they've done it again.

Where *Supa Dupa Fly* was almost raw-edged, particularly on cuts like 'Hit Dem Wit Da Hee' and 'Izzy Izzy Ah', this is



smoother with an understated sense of the cinematic. Whole orchestras are edited into the gaps weaving through the clattering hi-hat under Missy's resonant expressive voice. When she sings it can break your heart, and when she flows effortlessly into rap, grown men dive for cover, not least of all special guest Eminem who runs off wailing: 'Mommy, Mommy. Missy done lost her mind! I think somebody done pissed her off this time!' And speaking of guests, there's Lil' Kim informing y'all that she'll be more than happy to fuck the shit up of anyone with a problem about her use of the word 'bitch', or more phonetically speaking 'bye-aaatch!' (© Snoop Dogg): MC Solaar turns up to rhyme in fluent Francais; Juvenile and B.G. represent for New Orleans in the deepest dirty South; Lady Saw toasts, illuminating a sudden realisation that with its use of gaps and offbeats, the Timbaland sound isn't a million miles away from the whole ragga-dancehall thing; Eminem proves he can turn this stuff on and off like a tap,

dropping some of his most eccentric lines to date: 'Call me boogie night, The stalker that walks awkward, Stick figure, Dick bigger than Mark Wahlberg', and I don't even care if that works in print.

I've tried writing this as I listen to the album, as is my usual practice, but it hasn't been easy, a track like 'Stickin' Chickens' comes along and all bets are off. It immobilises all rational thought, pinning you to the floor with a beat that could turn Brian Sewell into a body-popping homeboy. I don't think I really need to construct any carefully orchestrated final paragraph. Put *Da Real World* on your stereo and don't make any plans. This

album is fire!

Snoop Dogg ***No Limit Top Dogg*** **NO LIMIT RECORDS 7243 8** **47556 2 1 (1999)**

Snoop's definitely been in the wars since the release of his genre-defining *Doggystyle* album back in 1993; prime suspect in a murder inquiry, of which he was acquitted after a long time sitting around in limbo, during which the press went into overdrive with the obligatory demonisation. Also the legal wrangles of getting out of the contract at Death Row Records took its toll in time and frayed nerves. Thankfully this is all now firmly in the past, and a new found sense of well-being inspired by Christianity and fatherhood led him to New Orleans. And No Limit Records. His first album from that stable, *Da Game Is To Be Sold, Not To Be Told* wasn't quite received with universal praise, and it does to an extent sound like Snoop, Master P, and Beats By The Pound who provide much of the music, are still getting used to each other's methodology. It is a

little odd hearing Snoop's usual pounding G-funk replaced by the Southern styled subtleties of the No Limit soldiers. It's still a good album, only there's a sense that somewhere along the line something got lost in the post.

Anyway, the new one's here and we're firing on all cylinders again, cooking with gas, and so on. Among the large cast of musical contributors are DJ Quik and Snoop's original mentor, Dr Dre, and the music on the whole seems better suited to its leading figure. Guest vocalists include No Limit regulars Mia X, Silkk The Shocker, C-Murder and Mystikal alongside Raphael Saadiq. Just like the Snoop of old, it swings and bounces along nicely under a hot sun in a blue sky, beats pounding, here and there a synth burping out the sort of bad boy cool that Tarantino would kill for, carried by upbeat rolling funk, and of course, the main attraction.

It isn't difficult to understand Snoop's appeal. His leisurely conversational rhymes paint vivid pictures with economic clarity. He never fills a line with more words than it needs to hit the point home, and his soft spoken delivery sounds like it comes from a man who's never let even the shittiest of circumstances provoke him to anger. And that's pretty unusual considering some of his subject matter. Snoop's strength is that even as the narrator of drive-by shootings, crack deals, gang-bangings, and all that gangsta business, he somehow manages to come across as a nice guy, albeit one caught up in testing circumstances. There's more than a few prime cuts here, and tracks like 'Snoopafella', which does a G-thang on the Cinderella tale, and the phenomenal squelch-beat of 'Buss'n Rocks' pack more bad-ass funk into short tracks than I suspect is strictly legal. The Dogg is back, with an album that I can't help but describe as the dogg's bollocks.



C-Murder ***Bossalinie*** **NO LIMIT RECORDS, P2** **50035 (1999)**

Mia X excepted, C-Murder is to these ears the jewel in the crown of the No Limit boot camp. Having the secret identity of blue collar white trash in a badly-paid back-breaking job, I frequently wear a Walkman to relieve the brain-numbing tedium of doing repetitive and largely pointless work. Due to an almost continuous sense of pressure imposed by having to deal with

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arseholes and wanting to break the boss's jaw, I find the music which calms me best is not, surprisingly, sphincter-relaxing ambient drones, or even Judy Garland, but anything by someone who you just know has also had to deal with shit. The mighty Rollins is one such individual, but C-muthafuckin'-Murder, as he's introduced on a Mia X album, really hits the spot like no-one else.

Much of the music here, courtesy of Beats By The Pound, Sons Of Funk, Deadly Sounds and others, just exudes that laid-back funky cool, and sometimes an understated sense of menace, with which the name No Limit is synonymous. It's funny how some rock bands can scream and wail away like a tantrum feeding back into itself, and just about raise an eyebrow, yet C-Murder can frighten the life out of me by just mumbling away quietly to himself during a few minutes of music that wouldn't have sounded out of place in an episode of *Starsky and Hutch*. He's been compared to 2Pac, and there may be something in this, but I don't think the resemblance goes too deep. His thoughtful reflective style draws you in, as does the dialogue of any skilled storyteller who makes each member of the audience feel as though they're being addressed personally. And just as the unconscious inflections and intonations of a narrative convey information not contained within the actual spoken words, one finds this same sense of subtext in C-Murder's vocal. In 'Living Legend' when he raps 'I'm this close from doing another drive-by, and now I don't really wanna make another mother cry, but these niggaz is playin' with my fuckin' pride' (irrespective of how that might look on paper to some of you), you can almost see his hand gestures, and the different expressions of despair and confusion playing across his features. In fact the whole album is full of such extradimensional information, because like Snoop Dogg, his anger is kept in check, no matter how grim the described circumstances.

His brothers Master P and Silkk The Shocker both seem to enjoy a much higher profile within the hip-hop arena. Not to belittle either of them, but my money's on C-Murder, the proverbial quiet one at the back. This is probably the Gangsta analogy of Joy Division. And the next time I hear some prannet with a total of two hip-hop albums (usually Public Enemy, which hasn't actually been played since it came out fifteen years ago, and what

else but Lauryn Hill) banging on about naughty rappers celebrating violence and how it all sounds the same and is like, *weally mythogynthetic, man...* first I'm going to force them to listen to *Bossalinie* (and there'll be a test later)...then they can suck my m***** d***, g***** n no good busted ass m*****!



Mia X

Mama Drama
NO LIMIT RECORDS P2
53502 (1998)

There's a lot to be said for the old oriental proverb about the weakest dog being the one that barks the loudest. At the risk of alienating half of the human race, I'd say this applies with painful veracity to some of the more vocal instruments of female emancipation. I'm referring to the Andrea Dworkins of the world who may rant and tubthump with a fervour that would have impressed Adolf Hitler, but coming from safe, white and largely trouble-free backgrounds, and ridden with guilt at not actually having a lot to complain about beyond the price of mung beans, latch onto the most ridiculous of moral bandwagons just for the sake of having something to scream. This is why we get the tearful impassioned demands for the changing of oppressive fascistic womyn-raping words like HIStory and MANhole, into vaginally positive alternatives. It also explains the Riot Grrrl bands who sing about the right to eat choccy bars, like the issue's right up there with genocide and South American death squads. Ultimately, the only thing we learn from these chicks (ooops...typing error) is how divorced from reality they are. Valerie Solanas was NOT an embodiment of justifiable feminine rage, she was a sad nutter, and of no more significance than that bloke who broke into Buckingham Palace so he could have a chinwag with Her Maj. These freakishly incoherent harridans (sorry...damn this word processor) would run a mile if they ever came across a real strong woman, like Mia X. She's got reality all right! She's got so much reality it hurts!

The legend runs: *Mia X, first lady of the tank*, meaning the whole No Limit empire. I'm inclined to go further. For me she's the First Lady of hip-hop. There's plenty of serious competition of course: Foxy Brown, Missy, Charli Baltimore, MC Lyte, and the list

goes on. But when the clips, the piece, the car keys and the bank roll are all on the table being swept into an evidence bag, Mia X is the irresistible force that just rolls right over that old immovable object. With her strong New Orleans accent, she isn't always the easiest rapper to follow, and she tends to leave soulful R & B vamping to those whose voices are better suited, so wisely she just sticks to what she's best at: writing and dropping the rhymes. And what rhymes they are. There's no bullshit here, because like she says, it isn't about attitude, all her shit's for real. Yeah yeah yeah there's niggaz and bitches and dope slanging, lots of sexy rude stuff and so on and Mia probably never did get around to studying Chaucer and all those other dead guys, but you can't tell me that this stuff isn't fiercely intelligent or full of genuine insightful thinking just because people in Islington don't get it.

Like other No Limit soldiers, and let's face it too many black Americans, Mia has had more than enough tragedy in her life: friends and loved ones murdered and the kind of ghetto shit that would finish the Andrea Dworkins off in ten seconds flat. So there's no shortage of rage on this album, but it's tempered by wit, intelligence, and an almost evangelical gratitude for the simple pleasures of being alive, for the fact that even when it gets bad, you have to appreciate what good things you do have. Mia's lyrics are nothing less than poetry, and this claim is from someone who doesn't actually believe that much poetry is poetry.

Mama Drama (named for her fixation with the pun Mama Mia as a sort of Mafiosa den mother thang) is electrifying listening. The music is supplied by various members of Beats By The Pound, who always seem to go especially apeshit on Mia X albums. If you took away the raps and turned down the beats, 'Mama's tribute' wouldn't sound out of place slapped in the middle of a Philip Glass number; 'Imma Shine' could've come direct from the soundtrack of *Miami Vice*; 'I Think Somebody' does an impersonation of The Godfather over a collage of chattering beats made entirely from samples of different gunshots; the title track 'Mama Drama' is Laibach with street knowledge; 'What's Ya Point?', featuring guests Snoop Dogg and Terror Squad's Fat Joe, is from the gangbang episode of *Mission: Impossible* that never got made; 'Thugs Like Me' is a Rio carnival, but sexier and with er...misbehaviour; 'Daddy' and

'Fallen Angels' are soft-edged homages to Mia's pop and much missed ex-homegirl Jil Stanford. With a lesser talent on the mic, it'd be just schmaltz, but Mia X is on the case and these cuts never fail to bring a lump to the throat. As if to acknowledge the surreal eclecticism at work here, there's even a track about it: 'Puttin' It Down' opens with one of the homies asking in so many words how in the name of all things holy he's going to be able to rap over such a weird and jerky beat, only to be silenced by Mia X, Mystikal and others demonstrating that for a No Limit soldier, it ain't no thang. And even among these twenty mini-masterpieces, there's one track that manages to shine against such a backdrop of excellence. 'Don't Blame Me', featuring C-Murder and Mr Serv-On explains that contrary to what its critics seem to believe, gangsta rap isn't responsible for bringing up your children; surprisingly, this task is usually performed by the parents. As a message it's pretty simple, but it still needs saying, and the soundtrack by which it is delivered leaves me speechless every time.

So in conclusion, *Mama Drama*, like *Unladylike* and *Good Girl Gone Bad* before it, is magnificent. It's been on constant rotation on my Walkman for a few months now and still sounds fresh, with something new coming through each play. Some people may not have heard of Mia X yet, but it can only be a matter of time. I'd guess the only reason she doesn't rule the world is because she hasn't got around to it yet. Dammit! I'd MARRY this gal!



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SINCE WE LAST SAW EACH OTHER, DEAR READER, I HAVE BEEN privileged to attend some quite remarkable live shows in London - remarkable because here I am witnessing live on stage some very important players, musicians, composers, all American, here in this country some for the very first time. To have seen these people at all struck me as pretty uncanny; for it to happen in such a relatively short space of time verges on miraculous. It's also turned out to be a very humbling experience, proving how little I actually know or understand about these diverse musics, other than simply professing to like them. Let's face it, you could spend ten lifetimes simply exploring the work of any one of these guys if you wanted to do it justice. What's also happened is that a cluster of great concerts like this has raised the ante so much that it's virtually *spoiled me rotten* for the rest of my concert-going life! (Just kidding, sports fans).

It is, I suggest, a bit unhealthy to live in the world of collecting LPs. It's arguably better to experience music played live than hearing it on LP, though you can insist on the primacy of the inscribed LP text until you're blue in the face. The other problem with collecting records - researching them, looking at photographs, reading sleeve notes - oh, and listening to them occasionally - is you can lose your sense of perspective. You can forget that real people made this music, real composers who lived in the world - and they're still alive, some of them! So when the gods deign to descend from their Olympian heights, walking down a staircase of white cloud, you can bet your life that mere mortals such as myself (and several hundred others too, I'm happy to relate) will be there to enjoy a fine feast at the tables of Zeus, hungry for scraps which might fall...or something like that...and let their applauding hands speak for them, saying a great big 'thank you' to each performer for years of generous service to mankind!

Impossible I find to do any of these shows real justice with my usual prose passages of elegant descriptions, so just a few notes...

Cecil Taylor with Max Roach

Nothing can match seeing Cecil Taylor live, the very physical assault on the grand piano this man makes is better than a bout of all-in wrestling. A powerhouse of energy, an unstoppable force, going the distance in his usual marathon workout stint. Yes, this is why we attend live concerts all right! Would that I had 'dug' the 'cat' sooner in my short life I might have had the chance to see him play before this, but there you go. I've been collecting such LPs as I can since about 1981; if you've never heard him before then go ye and buy whatever you can right now, especially a solo piano LP like *Garden*. Fast, complex, energetic - and ultimately inscrutable, being too fast to understand, and talking in many tongues at once. This one concert on its own could, frankly, keep your mind occupied for aeons if you could explore every atom of it in slow motion - every piece he plays could be an inexhaustible document of invention. Along with this you see a more puzzling and eccentric side of the great man exhibited, say I referring to his beautiful mad unintelligible poetry delivered off-stage from a microphone, and his wonderful stage appearance like Aladdin in brightly-coloured costume; this insane garb tipping a nod of respect to Sun Ra, and showing us an astonishing manifestation of Afro-American culture which I suspect is in many ways beyond the ken of us Western Europeans, who no longer believe in the power of magic, ritual and religion.

Cecil Taylor personifies total free jazz, uncultured and untrammelled; shining forth through the bitter racism he (along with too many others) has had to fight against for most of this century. Loud cheers.

La Monte Young

A very accessible piece, this - a serene, quiet and meditative droning work scored for four trumpets and four cellos, and a variant on *The Second Dream*... a piece already issued on CD. La Monte himself didn't actually take part in the performance, but he turned up to address the throng and supervised the piece while his wife did the purple lighting effects. Being as how this was Winter 1998, our miserable isle found the populace stricken with the usual respiratory ailments, so the audience coughs and sneezes contributed to the ambience in the worst possible way, far better to have

A feast at the tables of Zeus

LIVE SHOWS 1998-1999

Cecil Taylor and Max Roach, 24 January 1999

The Theatre of Eternal Music directed by La Monte Young, 1 December 1998
Newband perform on the Harry Partch instruments, 27 November 1998

Terry Riley, with Jarvis Cocker and Members of Pulp, 23 October 1998

ALL AT THE BARBICAN CENTRE, LONDON

MOSTLY PART OF THE AMERICAN PIONEERS SEASON

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seen this talking place in some large, picture-windowed dream house in a bright sunny State of the USA. But, hearing the music, one was indeed transported to such an idyll in one's mind. I came away with my doubts intact, regarding the scope of Young's projects - it seems to be little more than four notes, the components of an arpeggio or chord, simply taken apart and extended into enormous dimensions of duration and endurance-testing limits. It's the same grandiosity, bordering on arrogant pomposity, that leads to gigantic canvasses painted in one colour occupying an enormous loft space. But this is what the Minimalist school was about. It did, if nothing else, succeed in undermining the conventions of a classical music performance; no sheet music, no conductor, and no real beginning or end, if that makes sense. The idea is the piece kinds of drifts in and out from total silence, which starts and finishes the work; large chunks of silence are fed into it in the middle too. I like the idea of using silence as a compositional element and wish that more people would do it! It works; the piece is still going on in my head.

Young himself appeared on stage, with his wife, to discuss his life and times - interviewed by the organiser of the Barbican American Innovators season. Young is full of himself in that way that Americans are brilliant at - you can't exactly hate them for it, but it sure isn't anything like our typical British reserve and modesty! His penchant for the denim garb still seems kinda bizarre somehow - he looks more like a biker than a modern composer, but maybe that's part of his appeal too. Of course, his ego is such that he wants to reclaim the one thing Minimalism tried to efface - the role of the composer as the one who owns the music, and a role which Young is only too happy to re-inscribe, and on his own terms. I did note how shrewd Young has been at documenting everything he does - and keeping the documents, which then acquire enough mystique to be exhibited (in the Fluxus tradition, any association with which he now disowns) as art objects around the world. This is exactly what happened to a roadside cafe napkin on which he jotted the initial notes for a composition; not given away generously like one of Picasso's napkins to pay for a meal, but hoarded away selfishly, waiting for the moment when it might advance his career and status.

Terry Riley

Not one but two concerts, of which I preferred the second at Conway Hall. It was solo piano playing by the man himself, looking very dapper with his little hat and big bushy beard, and holy-man bow of benediction to the audience. The structures and trancey looped drones of the 1960s are still perceivable as a core to Riley's work, but he's developed and extended his range - there are more chords, more composition, more narrative progression. You may regret these changes if like me you prefer the music that pretty much stays in one place for along time, but this new material (even when it veers a tad too close to the world of Chick Corea for my liking) is still very beatific and has its spiritual foundation. The Conway Hall performance also benefited from great sound projection courtesy of the collaborator who miked up the piano. This was so good that I overcame my natural reserve and enthusiastically went up him after the gig and said 'Fantastic sound - it was like being *inside* the piano!' - With a grin he replied, 'That's the idea!'

The first concert included as the 'show-stopper' a very long performance of *In C* with a large combo of musicians including two members of the group Pulp. This turns out to be not as surprising as I first thought, since both Mark Weber and Jarvis Cocker share some of my interests in the visual arts - Weber with avant-garde cinema, Cocker with Outsider Art. Weber also conducted a very good series of interviews with La Monte Young which you must have all seen by now. However, I didn't enjoy this performance of *In C* one bit - it's become almost an avant-garde stadium anthem! Oh dear, how it lumbered... but I mustn't sound ungrateful.

Newband performing the music of Harry Partch

Again, the danger of losing oneself in the world of the printed media is observable here. If you own a copy of the *Delusion of the Fury* box set on CBS, you also own a beautiful LP sized booklet which prints some of the most sumptuous photographs of the Harry Partch instruments

ever produced. The pleasure that can be derived from drooling over these photos is...erm, almost pornographic. In fact most record dealers find it hard to sell copies of this boxed set because the pages of the booklets are invariably stuck together (true fact).

How happy I am to have lived long enough to see these unique and wonderful instruments, on stage, the original pieces. Entering the auditorium was like entering the workshop of an alchemist - they were truly magick devices. The concert for me started as soon as I'd clapped eyes on them - it was music for the eyes! In fact they sound every bit as good as they look, and were played with considerable delicacy and care by the Newband troupe under the direction of their benign leader, Dean Drummond. Perhaps a bit too delicate; the music was rather quiet and trancey, lacking some of the bite and attack you hear on the records, but this may be simply attributable to the acoustics of the Barbican - which aren't very good, truth be known, despite its reputation as a major centre for music performance. Drummond (who also had two of his own compositions for the Partch instruments performed), as Newband leader and now curator of the instruments, also answered questions from the audience, and even gave a brief but startling demonstration of all the notes in an octave than could be performed on the Chromelodeon, a harmonium-like instrument. The instruments have been in peril, threatened with dispersal when the University faculty in the USA decided they weren't going to store them any longer; but I think the situation has been rectified now. Nothing is guaranteed survival in this naughty world.

The music of Harry Partch continues to fascinate. I recommend heartily that you get sight of the scrapbook of photographs and press cuttings, and other archival-ish memorabilia, that are reproduced as the *Enclosure 3* book. If (as suggested above) one is in danger of forgetting that real people made this music, this book might just bring you down to earth. Intense scrutiny of these photos is recommended; they reveal another world, a between-the-wars America, where Partch struggled alone and alienated. His emotions extend out into visual manifestations sometimes, reflected in the twisted landscapes where he was photographed. Some of those trees seem, in true Zen fashion, ready and willing to give up their lives for the honour of being re-fashioned into one of his instruments.

ED PINSENT



ATOMS OF PURE N-O-I-S-E

non-musical bursts
& energetic bruits

A Kombi

Music to Drive-By
AUSTRALIA, DUAL PLOVER IMR
551BRD (1996)

Credited to A Kombi, the Volkswagen van of Lucas Abela, this is a compelling, strange and at times highly soothing piece of abstract noise music. It's about as far as you can get from formal or academic experimental music, as is shown by its very down-to-earth origins. After he'd found his van was capable of generating strange sounds, entirely by accident, Abela decided to document it and recorded this, out in a remote graveyard on the edge of a cliff facing the Pacific ocean. Lucas Abela had been living out of the back of his van for some time, and the only place he could fetch up where the 'pigs' didn't 'hassle' him, was this bone orchard in the middle of noplac. Abela claims this is his first real record, coming soon after a few live radio broadcasts he'd managed in Australia; and no denying it was an outcropping of his lifestyle at this point, less a piece of composed music than a documentary recording of what was going down in his life.

Although one is tempted to compare this record to *Un Chien Catalan*, the insane release by Vagina Dentata Organ (Jordi Vallis) which was simply the sounds of his motorbike, it turns out this is not simply the sound of A Kombi's engine being recorded straight. 'It was A Kombi's stereo that made all the noise', claims Abela. The vehicle was in such a state of (dis)repair that its very machinery was somehow reverberating through the stereo speakers; bits of the van, including the windscreen wipers, had accidentally become

amplified and were making unpredictable sounds. He gave 'roadside concerts' as a result, passers-by stopping in the street to hear the interesting concrete music issuing from this vehicle. Stopping in a tunnel would be the equivalent of doing Wembley stadium, a live concert utilising the natural acoustics of the street environment. But Abela was not the star - the car was the star! A Kombi was acquiring a life of her own, speaking to him and anyone else who would listen, in her unique voice. Lucas didn't ask questions - he just made tapes. Reviewers in the USA have inevitably drawn comparisons with movie 'character' Herbie the Love Bug (also a VW interestingly), but living cars have a long history. Look at the work of Ed 'Big Daddy' Roth and anyone who customised a Hot Rod in the early 1960s. Were they not recognising



the animalistic qualities of the inanimate object? I don't dig it myself, but I think I can imagine the bond that exists between a car and its driver, and it's probably something that runs deep.

Where are we. I like this CD! It could be one of my favourite records of found noise, some tiny unexplained miracle of the 20th century, in that a hunk of steel found a voice and generated some trancey drone sounds, and that ultimately surpass any formal or academic attempt to replicate the same thing (step forward, Fluxus group). It emerged naturally from the life on the streets, not within some rarefied art atmosphere. A punk record! You may not expect a symphony of sound, but it is nonetheless a wonderful thing.

ED PINSENT

Lucas Abela is interviewed this issue.

Dissecting Table Life

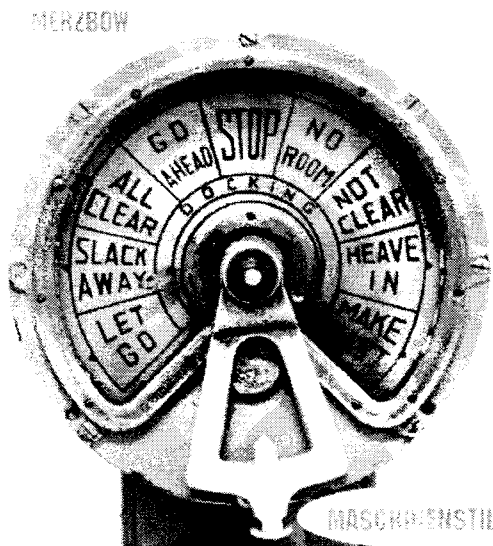
USA, RELEASE RR 6401-2 (1998)

Bloody Hell. What a fucking racket!

Dissecting Table is the work of Ichiro Tsuji, if that means anything to anyone out there. Everything about the cover, even down to the typeface and shade of monochrome, screams Skinny Puppy and my immediate thought was that this must be one of their four million side projects. Well, it isn't, and it doesn't sound anything like the few Skinny Puppy cuts I've heard. Four tracks are listed on the sleeve, and recognised by the CD player, but there

sounds to be a couple of hundred. We open with a minute or so of sub-Ministry sample thrash and switch suddenly to a formless cacophony of feedback and synth noises which sound rather like sheep. I don't know if this power electronics equivalent of Percy Edwards is intentional, but it makes for a comic moment, particularly as the track is called 'The Needs Of the Body'. There's precious few laffs after that though, and not much I can really get a handle on as it skips rapidly from free noise to thrash metal to Front 242 style hardbeat with joins that, I suppose, could best be described as seamful. A lot of this is industrial goth noise kak, but to be fair, there is the odd moment of lucidity. In brief snatches Mr Table turns without warning into an early Swans record, or operatic metal-bashing, or Nitzer Ebb with a real bummer of a headache. Such moments are actually pretty good, except he never sticks to them for long enough for anything to really get going. Perhaps this is the idea, to irritate the listener into submission by confounding an expectation before you've even finished having the last one confounded. If this is so,

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while it may be fine on paper, it's pretty annoying on disc. Perhaps if he kept some of the themes running a little longer, I'd like it more. I'm not suggesting turning the whole collection into Perry Como but honestly, somebody has paid shekels to put this out, so do they want people to buy it, or what?

WAR ARROW

Sonic Youth

Silver Session for Jason Knuth

USA, SONIC KNUTH RECORDS SKR 1 (1998)

The theme lurking behind this wall of noise? Suicide! Even before hearing this one you know it's gotta be a winner. *Silver Session* is dedicated to a guy who was so hung up on honesty, music and friendship - probably in that order - that he eventually killed himself. Sonic Youth were foiled one day from taping the vocal tracks to their recent double LP because a band upstairs were playing too loud. By way of retaliation they turned up all their amps as loud as they could, set up a wall of noisy feedback...and walked away. Actually they didn't walk away, they taped it, and plugged a clapped out old drum machine into the PA system which would make waves of pulsing beats out of the unapproachable blankets of noise.

Last issue you heard my lament: 'There's a Sonic Youth feedback CD somewhere in the welter of new releases out there, which I can't be bothered to look for because I hate going out of the house.' *Silver Session* was what I was referring to, and I bought it from a list, so I didn't even have to go out of the house to get it. Listening to this half-hour gem you find it's not as extreme as the above patter might suggest - it is not, mark you, mastered as loud as the average Merzbow monstrosity - but that comes as a relief anyway, since you wouldn't wanna be deafened as they were (they couldn't enter their own studio, driven back by mountains of pulsating noise). I detect little or no actual guitar 'playing', but the beatbox provides just the right amount of intervention into the stark bleakness of shimmering fury.

There was, I think, some post-production. Mostly in the editing, shaping the formless

chaos into a number of short bite-size chunks. As the same intense frequency recurs through most of these chapters, I have read the CD as an episodic sound-movie depicting the stages of Knuth's torment during his last hours on this earth. The track 'Silver Wax Lips' is particularly harrowing, and as it reaches an emotional pitch of unbearable tension, it abruptly cuts out - thus sparing us that insight into the unknowable depths of Knuth's despair. Mostly the CD does not really elicit empathy with the plight of the suicide, but rather pans out to show a bigger picture of a world full of indifference, people left untouched by the loss of another human being. *Silver*

Session, then, is a mighty Flying Fortress equipped with powerful scanning devices, flying across continents and searching for a compassionate heart of gold - and probably failing. The world is a dark globe, grim in aspect. If you don't take responsibility for yourself, nobody else will.

ED PINSENT

Merzbow

Maschinenstil AUSTRALIA, DUAL PLOVER COQ-ROQ (1998)

Queen boasted 'there are no synthesisers on this album'. The Human League retaliated with 'there are no guitars on this album'. Merzbow seems to have ended the debate with the severity of a *Viz* comic punchline in the proud upper case proclamation of 'NO OVERDUB, NO KEYBOARD, NO STUDIO'. Sew a button on *that*, numbnuts!

I am in almost complete ignorance of Merzbow, with just one album that I know I enjoyed on the one occasion I listened to it, and I only know this because it's still in my collection. Other than that, there's a limit to the amount of noise I feel I really need, at least outside of early Nocturnal Emissions and suchlike. Still, this is a stirring work. Cacophonous and relentless throughout, it keeps head and shoulders safely above boredom threshold. I doubt I really need to tell you lot what it sounds like - after all, I'd hardly expect you to start lecturing me on pre-Hispanic Mexico or dinosaur metabolism. *Maschinenstil* could be the worst of all two million Merzbow albums released this year for all I know. Or even the best. Whatever the case may be, it proves that the simplest ideas are probably those which require the most care and attention. This shares a lot in common with the album by Dissecting Table reviewed above, but whereas that just flops around all over the shop, *Maschinenstil* has pace, timing, and its author displays a strong sense of when and when not to mix the fuzzed-up tumble dryer noise in with the tape of someone kicking their television in.

A fitting addition to the roster of a label that is rapidly becoming Australia's finest export.

WAR ARROW

Merzbow

Door Open At 8am CANADA, ALIEN8RECORDINGS ALIENCD17 (1999)

Merzbow. Masami Akita - the guvnor, the Mack Daddy of sonic terrorism, the landlord in the house of Noise. There are many pretenders to the throne but no-one else even comes close. Merzbow has done it all louder and faster and for longer than anyone else and he's still doing it. But recently there's been signs of change in his aesthetic approach. After the skull scouring onslaught of 1997's *Pinkream* our man has been expanding his territory. While Eric Clapton changes a string and Fatboy Slim finds another 60's vinyl orphan to violate, Merzbow gets a Moog and plays a homage to free jazz. Those suddenly concerned about black polo necks and mellow chin-stroking needn't worry - this is about as 'jazz' as my hairy arse but what is immediately apparent is that he's turned the volume down and is (sorry, can't help this one slipping out) 'employing a new sonic palette'. Admittedly the first track 'Intro' is business as usual - as loud and ferocious as anything he's ever done before - but 3 minutes later we're into 'Tony Williams Deathspace' and there's a recognisable 'beat' over which he lays static bursts and high frequency whines. Maybe it is jazz but only that of a kind played in some Cyborg Playstation sub-level of Dante's Inferno. The rest of the tracks are as restrained as Merzbow can be as he takes the listener on a tour of the cityscape in his head. Traffic thunders by, police sirens wail in the distance, gangsta rap pulses through the windows of a stolen jeep, a young Hispanic couple argue in their apartment while their HIV infected baby cries, blind people cross on the beep, steam hisses out of vents in the road, trashcan fires spew out toxic smoke that blinds the neon strip club signs while 747's fly in low overhead. As an aural panorama of the city it has no equal - every street, every subway, every garbage strewn alleyway is burnt into the disc, the laser skips over every kerb and rooftop as if they were the grooves in Akita's brain, picking out the signals he wants us to hear.

While more obvious acts like Atari Teenage Riot have appropriated Merzbow's original trademark thunder the man's output continues to intrigue and fascinate.

His boldest move to date is this album's 20 minute Coltrane homage 'Africa Sessions Vol. 2'. Whether or not it's intended as a 'cover' is debatable but it soon goes into high gear, reaching a cacophonic crescendo that Coltrane would have choked to death trying to match. The result is nothing we'll see on 'Later...With Jools Holland' anytime soon but it's still another tentative step closer to a more 'accessible' Merzbow sound. Perhaps this is his strategy - to lull the unwary listener into a false sense of security with music that barely rattles the dust on your speakers - before hitting the listener with a tornadic blast of that which he does best? Whatever the case, Akita stands alone - committed to his vision and undiverted by ephemeral concerns with markets and audiences. Merzbow continues to make most everyone else working on the limits of the 'avant garde' sound pointless and redundant.

RIK RAWLING



The Second LaBradford Festival of Drifting

LaBradford - Oval - John Lacey
- Chris and Cosey
The Union Chapel, Compton
Terrace, London N1
30 May 1999

FIRST, TO DJ NOVAFROST WHO WEAVES A SEAMLESS TAPESTRY OF NERVY BEATS from his big pile of records, most of which the likes of you or I are unlikely to encounter otherwise. His set is kicked off by Nurse With Wound of all people, which provides a somehow fitting prologue to the hard, but not overly anal, techno that follows. It's mesmeric without being soporific or needlessly ethereal. Novafrost can be contacted on 0958 419815, and his fine mix tape (entitled *The Night Factory*) made for an enjoyable bus journey as I proceeded in the general direction of The Union Chapel, blissfully unaware of the tedium that lay in store.

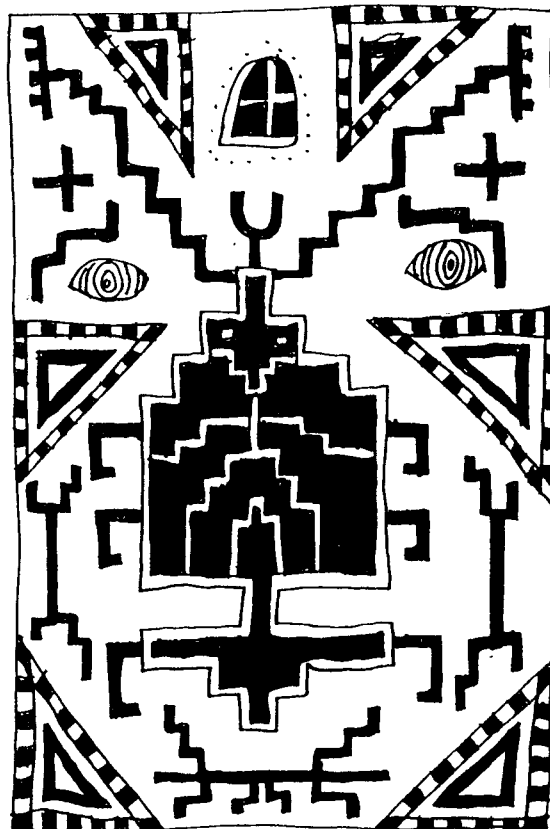
If you are familiar with the performers named above, then you should have a general idea of the kind of music that was faithfully reproduced here. One might think that a live performance, and in so beautiful a setting as the Union Chapel, and with slides and films, might fill in a few blanks of the kind that arise when a band's sound fails to impress in its prerecorded form. This often proves to be the case. Con-Dom are rather forgettable on the tapes I've heard, but in a live setting they make your ears bleed. Mind you, it didn't happen here. LaBradford and Oval bored me as rigid live as they do on disc, if 'live' isn't too

generous an adjective in this case, which I rather suspect it is. Slow. Understated. Brooding. Yes, it was all of that I'm sure, but was it really too much to ask that my attention might be engaged at some point during the evening? Neither LaBradford or Oval are so important as to have a unique vision that demands unquestioning receptivity. My fridge makes some pretty interesting noises as well. Perhaps I should get it signed to Mute Records.

After what seemed like years during which all potential avenues of killing time had been truly exhausted (repeated visits to the bar, toilet, and outside for a ciggie) John Lacey, film-maker and Chris and Cosey collaborator, came on and raised my expectation of something vaguely interesting being on the cards. This entailed dragging a suitcase around stage on a length of rope, accompanied by films with related suitcase based themes. Although at first coming over like the arrival of Billy Smart's Circus in comparison to the dreary opening performers, this inscrutable brand of suitcase based tomfoolery got old fairly quick. So it is nice that he managed to at least keep it brief.

Chris and Cosey were the reason for my attendance, their having been involved in some good stuff over the years. This said, they've also perpetrated more than enough execrable plinky-plonky synth crap, some of which got wheeled out again tonight. The proceedings started off with a drone, and then a rhythm, a bit of processed trumpet, and so on and so forth. Like a knackered car on a misty morning the false starts were many before ignition came, in the form of the loud and beat-driven Chris and Cosey of 'Driving Blind' from the *Songs Of Love and Lust* album. Unfortunately this apparent mission to reproduce their records note-for-note and blip-for-blip, loudly and in a live setting, without too much messy excitement getting in the way, was a resounding success. It wasn't a complete waste of time I'll admit, but I suspect even the recorded oeuvre of Mr Blobby would have sounded pretty darned radical had the spotty pink entertainer chosen to head the bill.

WAR ARROW



The **CRACKLING** + **ETHER, 1:**

The Friendly Glow of Electronic Music and Dark Ambient

Hazard

North

**ASH INTERNATIONAL [R.I.P.] # ASH
4.5 (1999)**

A decent bit of Ambient environment-influenced electronic droning from Benny Jonas Nilsen, a young Swedish musician. The guy comes from a background of collecting field recordings, following developments in the international Industrial scene, and making videos; he has made several prior releases as Morthond / Morthound and one other CD as Hazard. A true nature lover, one assumes - these tracks paint evocative pictures of very bleak, cold landscapes, indiscernible foggy horizons, and always somehow manage to suggest the presence of water not far away. A boat pulling up on the beach, fishermen cursing the emptiness of their lives, doomed lovers about to commit themselves to a suicide pact by leaping into the maelstrom...very wholesome.

ED PINSENT

through with a fairly unrelenting sense of gloom, it is never less than bracing and exciting music, and depressing it certainly is not. The sheer variety of themes and approaches gives you more value for money per square inch than an entire shop full of electro dance music. If you want some idea of what might be in store for your aural canals, it be largely of an electronic persuasion, played by a bank of synths and keyboards probably sufficient to set up competition with the whole of Denmark Street WI. There is no end of sampling tapestry, the intricacy of which shows the two years' worth of effort poured into the project. But here also be a bass clarinet, these rich chocolatey blasts of doom puffed with a grim determination by one Niall Webb, a plucky honk-guy whose fingers clutch the instrument in a stranglehold; forget about jazz, this guy is a fairy-tale hobgoblin, out to send men mad with his howls of woodwind. Drum machines lurch into earshot for a track or two, programmed by alien digits who sabotage anything resembling a danceable metrical beat (thank heavens). Some tracks are friendly ambient, some leaning more

to the darker side of that territory. Looped and treated voices stutter in and out of the Dantean nightmare landscapes, leaving only faint traces of their messages. OK - you may think you've heard this before on a hundred United Dairies records, and I'm not the collector who can give a final answer to that. But there's little retro about this record that I can hear, it is not clinging to some glory days when Throbbing Gristle were Kings of the Dark Zones (if they ever were) and chances are this should appeal to any open-minded listener who wants a taste of the sepulchral in their diet.

Cyclobe comprises Stephen Thrower (of Coil 1985-1993 - he appeared on most of their important titles, and worked with Skullflower too); and Simon Norris (of Death In June 1991-1995). The CD sports a gruesome red and black cover which appears innocent enough, like the images one discerns inside a blazing furnace, but many an incautious viewer hath lost their wits through gazing too long at the marks insculped thereon...tortured faces of demons lurk within, their mouths disclosing the faces of still more demons. Even though I place little stock in the paraphernalia and esoterica surrounding 'the man downstairs', I understand Coil had developed more than a passing interest in that area. The theme of this one is 'maybe trying to achieve higher awareness', and titles refer to such altered states and phenomena as dreaming, ecstasies, extra-sensory perception, animal instincts, angelic spirits...not a bad catalogue of the paranormal to get your teeth into.

ED PINSENT

Transient v Resident

WKCR

DISCUS B-CDR (1998)

An exemplary new double CD from the ever reliable Martin Archer and Chris Bywater. Unlike less gifted button-pushers who swarm like microbes in the zones of electro-synth manipulation, Archer and Bywater won't just settle for the first pre-set that their stubs happen to alight upon and let the sequencers take over while their noggins take a nap. These astro-physicists of the analogue wave understand their machines, and let them speak to each other in a respectful, communicative and highly productive environment. This is the audible process of people constantly cranking out ideas on all six, emphatically not some intellectual cheapskate flim-flams, selling you one idea spun out to CD length through 14 variations. The detail in the construction of these complex synth dialogues, the sound-window spaces through which you can see yet more detailed layers of work, are testament to the skills of these artists and their thirst for investigation. Check out the work method they

Cyclobe

Luminous

Darkness

PHANTOM CODE

OMCO 01 (1999)

An extremely impressive record from these UK musicians with their impeccable credentials. It's a CD that works overtime, enscribing a very dense surface full of textures and unusual inventions that repays close and repeated listening, crafted by adepts who know their way backwards around the labyrinth of the modern recording studio and can train their instruments, effects and tape devices to stand on their head. How many records have you heard lately that can claim such dexterity, such commitment to quality? Although the whole CD, it has to be said, is from start to finish shot



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occasionally use to keep each other fresh and alert, where 'one member is put on the spot to come up with a response to pre-composed / recorded material by the other in (more or less) real time'. Tension! For another recorded example of this kinda interaction, see Durrant and Butcher's *Secret Measures* in the Improv section this ish.

An oldish work, recorded in 1995 and considered for release at same time as *Electrical Shroud*, this 50 minute electro-odyssey has lain dormant since it was first commissioned and committed to disk for the Columbia State University campus radio station, WKCR-FM. Richo Johnson (in his catalogue) says of Transient V Resident: 'I'm confident that had this particular wash of electro-babble emanated from anywhere but the UK, a flood of hipper-than-thou namedrops would be waiting just around the corner'. We can only echo this sentiment when, at time of writing, the media telescope continues to focus on trendy digital manipulators from Germany and ignores home-grown talent of this quality. WKCR comes with a CD ROM which causes strange blinking, superimposed cinema images to flicker tentatively across your computer screen; the more memory your hard drive has then the better it'll look, I guess. A handy visual aid. The only drawback I can find so far is that the sound quality of the recordable CD may leave a little room for improvement; you don't get quite the clarity and impact of Archer's previously commercially-manufactured items. But there's likely to be an economic reason behind this.

ED PINSENT

Vidna Obmana and Asmus Tietchens *Motives for Recycling 2 x CD*

USA, SOLEILMOON RECORDINGS
SOL 84 (1999)

Belgian Vidna Obmana remixes some recordings made by the veteran synthesist Tietchens, and succeeds merely in rendering them down into dull, run-of-the-sequence Ambient mush. Rarely does this rise above the common herd of such music, apart from on the second disc which features remixes of *Nachstücke*, an LP originally recorded between 1975 and 1978. There's a little more drama here provided I think simply by the sound of pre-digital synthesisers and Revox tape recorders, but finally, so what? Vidna regards this work as recycling music, rather than remixing it, because he's putting everything 'through the wringer', effecting a very modern form of deconstruction. Again, so what?

German Asmus Tietchens may not have directly contributed to this project, other

than providing the original source material, but he ain't no slouch - in fact he has a distinguished career of making solo experimental electronic industrial records in his

things that 98% of Ambient swill does NOT - even though it wishes it could. This *Reculver* CD may not like the mantle, but it sets a new standard for a thousand tape-cutting, button-pushing, droning electric-snouted truffle pigs to follow.

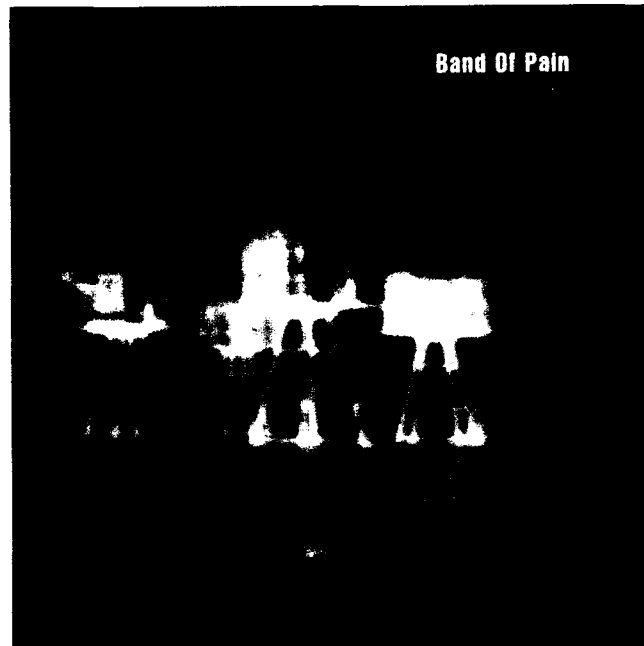
Each track presents a totally distinct, strong, specific mood and genuine atmosphere - that overused and devalued term finally has some meaning again here - and this IS disconcerting music, imbued with a palpable psychological menace, has genuine musical development and tension; the tracks have actual start and finish points (rather than simply drifting in and out again like some shambling, apologetic wretch); and *Reculver* is compellingly strange enough to keep you riveted to your chair in a state of enjoyable tension right up until end of disc time.

There's a precision and expertise in the use of materials. In amongst the eerie drones and spectral foggings, there is sparing use of subliminal voices, samples and barely-discernible intrusions of detailed electronic brushwork.

So subtle are these devices, yet simultaneously so malevolent, that it's like feeling a slight twinge in your shoulder and turning round to discover that an expert assassin has been amputating your arm with miniature, razor-sharp scalpels. True, there are some residual traces of 'shocking' imagery here and there in titles and in sound, suggestions I think of a serial killer, an episode of incest, and narratives tinged with satanic notions - all preoccupations of one whom I suspect to be something of a follower of the Industrial school of music and its related offshoots. But these are merely background information to the main agenda, which is on another plane altogether. There's more than a trace of despair, for example, in the world-weary sleeve note that reminds us how soon this century is going to end. These tracks are moments of clarity in the madness of the late 20th century hothouse where everyone's playing mix-and-match musical chairs; Band Of Pain's oracle prophesies stark insights into the futility of all our endeavours.

Respect then to Mr Steve Pittis, who is Band Of Pain. Stefan Jaworzyn appears in disguise on the final track, which is perhaps my favourite here; a deeply beautiful valediction to the last 100 years (try playing it on New Year's Eve). Actually it's got the kind of title that militates against that - 'Habanero High' - which I support, if it's a reference to the Habanero chile. This culinary ingredient is about the hottest red pepper legally available on these shores, and thus highly favoured in the kitchen of this writer, and the dizzying high you get after biting into one of these monsters is so outrageous it oughta be decriminalised.

ED PINSENT



Hamburg studio. After a few collaborations involving Cluster / Eno and Lilienthal, he kicked off his solo career with the above mentioned *Nachstücke* LP, released in France on the Egg label in 1978. 'Weirdly melodic and atmospheric purely electronic music', is how Andrea Cernotto describes it in his list. Similar records followed. Some of them were released on the Sky label in Germany (also home to some fine Cluster LPs), for example *Litia*, *In Die Nacht* and *Spat-Europa*. His music took a harsher turn in 1983 with the release of *Formen Letzer Hausmusik*, which appeared on United Dairies in the UK. And there's some lock-groove monstrosity remix thing - the American label RRR put out a seven-inch single comprising one hundred lock grooves. Tietchens remixed it and wound up with a triple LP's worth of material, also issued by RRR as *Ptomaine*. Then of course there are CDs such as *Sinkende Schwimmer*, *Nottumo* and *Das Fest ist Zu Ende* which I'm sure you can't live without, described in the These Records catalogue as 'austere, downbeat works...not for thrill seekers.' NB: I've never actually heard any of these records - this is just my thorough research for you. You go and seek them out, and if you like them then why not write in and tell me about it.

ED PINSENT

Band Of Pain

Reculver

DIRTER PROMOTIONS DPROMCD47
(1999)

Excellent - here is some of the most darned intelligent music you'll ever hear that's been released under the rubric of 'Dark Ambient'. We have reservations concerning that term, as does the creator, but this cluster of splendid long tracks succeeds admirably in doing all the

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Scalpel

Eclipse

NAIVE RECORDINGS NRC001 (1998)

Far be it from me to turn supergrass but the first track on this disc sounds almost identical to 'Mansonik I' from Konstruktivists' *Psykho Genetika* album. Either this chap Gary Jeff has added his own sounds to a muffled and indistinct copy of that particular track, which is a bit blummin' saucy I think you'll agree, or alternately, the resemblance (which is general rather than specified by any unmistakable moment of glaring tea-leafery) could be entirely coincidental. However, the brain behind Eclipse does seem to work in the same strange way as that of NKVD, the main cheese of Konstruktivists, and I gather they use similar equipment, so quite probably it is simple but incredible coincidence.

This should at least serve to hint at what you'll find here: lengthy and sparse constructions of abstract electronic sound. The quality is actually quite poor, as though everything's gone through a number of old analogue delays before making it onto disc, but somehow this serves to heighten the sense of atmosphere, which is heavy with portentous foreboding throughout, despite few cards actually being laid on any tables. It quietly drones on and off like a miserable wet Sunday that has by some means lodged itself in the corner of the room. There's little drama but it's too edgy to be described as ambient. In case I seem a little ambiguous here, perhaps I'd better just stress that these are compliments. *Eclipse* is an effective and well-considered album, much of which suggests the sort of thing that an alternate universe incarnation of Konstruktivists might do, so I suspect the resemblance between 'Chemical Horizon' and 'Mansonik I' really is just a case of great minds thinking alike.

WAR ARROW

Nocturnal Emissions

Duty Experiment

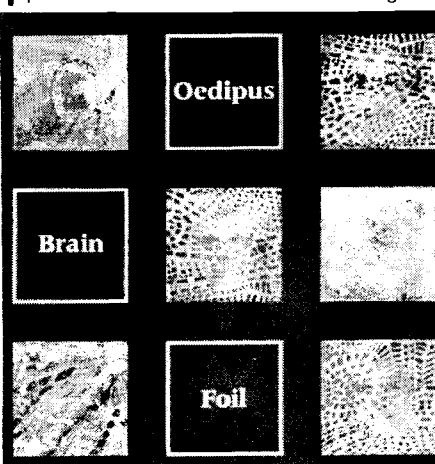
SOLEILMOON RECORDINGS SOL5 CD (1995)

Practical Time Travel

EARTHLY DELIGHTS CD001 (1998)

The Emissions, or more properly The Emission, performed Upstairs At The Garage quite recently. The gig, sad to say, was a bit disappointing. Mr Ayers basically vocalised in his distinctive wailing Mark E Smith style over a backing tape of mainly beaty stuff, much of which was from the *Songs Of Love And Revolution* album, with a cover of 'Venus In Furs' thrown in just to keep the assembled punters confused. The problem was that a shit PA without much in the way of volume served to create an uncanny sense of electropunk karaoke at a village disco. So with nothing visual to draw our focus other than Nigel's silver trousers and passing resemblance to Paul Merton, the evening did leave a bit to be desired. This is a shame, because listening to the tape the next day, without the frame of volume reference imposed by actually being there, it sounds like a live experience worth remembering: noise, beats and acid wit in the finest Emissions tradition.

So, onto a different medium, the enjoyment of which doesn't rely on someone else's crap PA system. These discs could almost be regarded as bookends sandwiching the lengthy existence of N.E. throughout various incarnations. *Duty Experiment* collects previously unreleased oddities from around 1980 to 1984. As you might imagine it's abrasive stuff - dirty, primitive and uncompromisingly hardcore. Understandably N.E. have studiously avoided any association with that word 'industrial', but it has to be said that for a few years Nocturnal Emissions (along with SPK) sounded about as industrial as it gets. Is it music or should we get the shop steward to hold a referendum? N.E. seemed to be about all the mundane horrors of daily reality - repetitive stress, bad food, vile tabloid newspapers, and choking on the fumes of deafening heavy machinery, all mangled up car-crusher style into a big stinking chunk of toxicity. There's no trace of The Beatles, Elvis, punk, or anything you'd recognise as music in here. In fact you'd have to look closely to find echoes of Faust or Luigi Russolo. Even musical interludes provided with drum machine or something



approximating a tune sound like the only human involvement was from some anonymous white overall upstairs sending the order down to fit a different head on the grinder. It doesn't even seem right to call this music or art or whatever, as it operates on some far more fundamental level. And in case I'm not making myself clear the message is *check it out y'all*. You've heard the imitations, now listen to the real thing. This is how it was before the imitators got their grubby little hands on it and turned it into something *The Guardian* arts page wouldn't feel too threatened by.

On a less headache-inducing note, *Practical Time Travel* is N.E.'s most recent offering. The music is entirely different yet still retains that quality of being created somewhere outside of conscious human involvement. Whatever practical time travel may be, all we have are disembodied titles like 'Electrostatic Field Equation' and 'Gravitational Repulsion' to suggest vague imagery for the meandering washes of tone and sound. If I might venture further (and someone please keep me covered in case I disappear up my own arse) this could almost be the experience of being as far from the grinding machines and noise of humanity as possible, drifting into the vacuum of deep space, carried away into the void by solar winds. The recent BBC2 documentary *The Planets* instilled in me a sense of longing

for places like Neptune and Mercury, which seemed impossibly rich from the absence of life and all its clutter. The universe is so vast, diverse and beautiful that frankly, who gives a monkey's if anyone else is out there. Who would go into a shop for something they've already got too much of at home?

Ahem...such musings come back to me whilst listening to this CD, if that's any use to those of you wondering what it actually sounds like. The occasional disappointing gig is easily forgiven when the prerecorded variant is of this calibre.

WAR ARROW

Randy Greif, Robin Storey and Nigel Ayers

Oedipus Brain Foil

SOLEILMOON SOL66CD 3 X CD (1999)

Three collaborative CDs, each featuring a different combination of two of those named above. Robin Storey is best known from Zoviet*France and Rapoon, Nigel Ayers from Nocturnal Emissions, and I can't quite place Randy Greif although for some reason his name is very familiar, so perhaps he's a moonlighting Happy Monday or a lesser-known component of Wu-Tang Clan. Just kidding.

Those expecting three hours of spoken word advice on how to improve their golfing have probably picked up the wrong magazine, so it might not surprise the more astute reader to learn that these discs contain lengthy atmospheric pieces which drift and churn like the best of ambient without quite merging into a single amorphous mass of novocaine for the ears. The instrumentation, which obviously varies from disc to disc, is ambiguous but largely electronic, with a few well-placed wind instruments, the odd rhythmic loop, and occasional interjections to mildly jolt the listener out of the inevitable mesmeric glow that comes and goes in waves. I'd be hard pressed to detail how each disc differs from its partners largely due to lack of space and the limitations of language, but differ they do, and on many subtle levels. I'm fairly certain I can identify the distinctive contributions of each individual up to a point, not that it matters beyond having some vague insight into the overall chemistry at work, and the reassurance that everyone pulls their weight. If I have a personal favourite, it is the Robin Storey and Nigel Ayers set collectively entitled *Perfidious Albion*, which ends with 'Let Loose The Dogs', one of the more intense and nervy creations in this microverse.

I've yet to feel truly comfortable about the term 'ambient'. It suggests something which is intended to provide an aural complement to your environment. *Oedipus Brain Foil* will actually take over your environment, if you listen for long enough, drawing you into a temporary pocket of reality where even the laws of physics feel unfamiliar and alien, and while no specific threat or comforting relaxant is offered, it alternately calms and disturbs without so much as a single raised voice. Awesome.

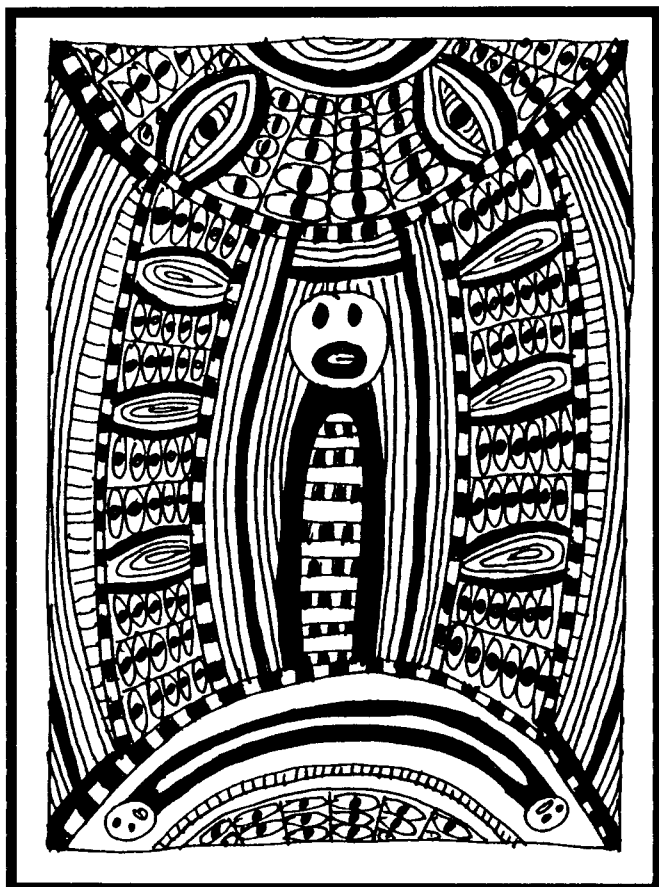
WAR ARROW

The Sound Projector Sixth issue 1999

THESE FIVE, REPRESENTING SOME AMBIENT electro muso talent from Australia and New Zealand, arrive spick and span in their uniform packaging both clean and white...stark...very minimalist, avant bedroom electronic noodling, housebound to the point that there isn't much of a life outside of the suburban bungalow equipped with TEAC four-track one suspects. However Rosy Parlane whips up one live performance in Sydney and by all accounts swept those attending off their respective tootsies. None of these yet has proved to be essential beta-blocks in the electronic diet, but there are many tasty nuggets of pleasure scattered through the five discs...Norbert Schilling (our man in Germany) reports that he has been playing little else since receiving a set, but then he's probably grown bored of his Rastermusic CDs by now. One of many projects enabled by Lucas Abela's pressing plant deal in Australia.

Rosy Parlane, #1-4 **AUSTRALIA, SIGMA EDITIONS** **SIGMA 001 (1998)**

This one proved itself to be a wee gem after a fairly unpromising start. There are seven tracks (despite a misleading title) and these are like seven separate illuminating journeys through the arterial tubes of Parlane's virtual landscapes and city networks. Pleasant surprises await you at every turn. Woven from a simple series of layered loops, roughened up around the edges, these repeato-switcho sojourns in Rosy-land evince a smaller-scale version of Philip Glass. Such modest ambitions - this in itself is a very attractive proposition to any sensible listener whose throat involuntarily swallows at the prospect of enduring a four-hour opera



scored by that overblown American serialist. Nice, modernist science fiction music...alternative soundtrack to *2001: A Space Odyssey* or *THX-1138* perhaps.

Parmentier, Luxsound **AUSTRALIA, SIGMA EDITIONS** **SIGMA 002 (1998)**

This one's something of a tumescent throbber...notable for its reliance on very loud, penetrating, speaker shattering, thick pulses of bass vibra-tones, which reappear like ghosts throughout the whole 50 minutes of this CD - like invisible asteroids invading our atmosphere, threatening to suck in all the remaining oxygen. Insistent use of locked grooves and loops, which actually don't develop very much apart from growing louder and more persistent - which means you gotta be patient with this CD, and even then you're not guaranteed enlightenment through listening - but it is kinda hypnotic and enveloping, listening to momma's heartbeat.

Minit, Music **AUSTRALIA, SIGMA EDITIONS** **SIGMA 003 (1999)**

An elaborate miniaturist construction this, from Torben Tilly and Jasmine Guffond, a duo based in Sydney. The building blocks they work with are microscopic fragments of sound, tiny little recorded samples, that I think are assembled according to predetermined structures. The surface is as intricate as a tightly-stitched embroidery, and you can get lost inside the tapestry-like vistas here; it can be very disorienting trying to follow the logic of their patterns. That said, it's remarkably passionless music, and perhaps

of the five Sigma groups their aims and ideals are the most pretentious. 'Minit reconstitutes time', they claim. 'Minit enact an autism.' Dammit, they even have the hubris to draw parallels between their work and the great film-maker Andrei Tarkovsky, and that's something that won't wash with this cinema-buff listener.

David Haines, Blither **AUSTRALIA, SIGMA** **EDITIONS SIGMA 004 (1999)**

From this Sydney-based artist comes a repetitive piano-based record, again very similar to a poor man's Philip Glass. It's all very nice, but a bit soft-centred: like the 1960s American Minimalists it opts for extremely lengthy duration, but I discern no apparent artistic motivation for this length, other than choosing to occupy 50 minutes of your time. Some decent grinding noisy shapes and celestial droning effects are generated, from looping piano samples or simply exploiting the overtone harmonic effects which pour out like smoke when you rub two chords together. It adds up to a sufficiently pleasing set of ten long tracks. The artist announces himself as a fan of Reich, Stockhausen, Varese and Nancarrow. 'It may be building up to a crescendo so gradually as to arrive there unnoticed', says Haines, of his first track. You can say that again...

Vladislav Delay, Ele **AUSTRALIA, SIGMA EDITIONS** **SIGMA 005 (1999)**

Sure to be a winner with fans of lo-fi or experimental Techno, and even I found it beguiling enough...the first track starts with a rubbery bombardment of totally de-centred beats - a disco party for microbes where all the guests have two left feet. Gradually this builds up into a fascinating chaotic muddle, until things overlap enough for a pattern to emerge - so if you can line it up properly in your head, this glorious sound image appears. A bit like one of those 3D-Eye pictures. Sequencers and drum machines are given a soul, and gently too. The method in Cologne at one stage seemed to be to rape the machines - overload them with too much data until they screamed in agony and exploded. In the UK, Techno programmers act like most English limp-dicked drunken lovers, humping their inert machines senselessly for two minutes after they come back from the pub. Here at last we might have found a programmer who's a real seductive, suave lover-boy, coaxing his circuits into full arousal...erm...anyway Vladislav Delay spin out three long tracks here, and though like all of 'The Sigma Five', the musician uses them darn looped samples yet again, at least this one besides being kinder to his machines than anyone else also admits to a strong dub influence, which can only be a good thing.

ED PINSENT

The **CRACKLING** **+ ETHER, 2:**

Somewhat more severe austere dry
and grating minimalist bleeps

Aube †† Al-Jabr †† Iron Rods †† Noto
†† ISO †† Klangkrieg †† Ryoji Ikeda †† Ballt.

Aube

Cardiac Strain

CANADA, ALIEN8 RECORDINGS
ALIEN CD2 (1997)

An excruciating listen. If you want unbearable tension, anxiety-inducing throbs, and intense screams layered over each other until you can bear no more, then sign up here for a torturous session of merriment. Cardiac Strain is an experimental noise record whose source material originated from recordings of the human heart pumping blood. The sounds have, natch, been treated extensively to the point where only a Christian Barnard could recognise their human origins. Building up to an intolerable level, before your very ears, the organic is completely transmuted into the mechanical - you would never believe something so uniquely close to every one of us could finish up sounding so utterly alien. This is probably the point of the exercise; the moral, if any, might be to ask the question what makes us human in the first place. The David Humes amongst you may well be prompted to explore this, and other philosophical enquiries, whilst spinning this monster; others may feel it's like listening to the aural equivalent of an autopsy movie. Actually it's more like having open-heart surgery performed on your head. But thankfully it's not all pain and endurance testing, a few spins should acclimatise you, and may even have you whistling these merry heart-stopping ditties as you greet the milkman next morning.

Aube is a notorious Japanese musician whose gimmick is to focus on a different single sound-source for each release (one of them uses only the pages from The Bible), and thereby achieve Nirvana through a rigid conceptual unity. I suppose concentration is his watchword; better to limit your resources to one intense, concrete statement than to risk some form of 'romantic' contamination by using too many random, diverse sources like the early musique concretists did. For another take on the biology versus technology dialectic, see Klangkrieg below.

Disinformation Vs Various

Artists *Al-Jabr*

ASH INTERNATIONAL [R.I.P.] # ASH
4.3 (1999)

If you've any serious interest in the development of modern electronic music, you need to hear this new Disinformation CD immediately. Further to the previous *Antiphony* double CD of remixes, and extending the Disinformation project yet further, comes this new CD of collaborations and remixes which suggests many challenging intellectual and philosophical possibilities beyond the mere realms of recorded sound. Improving on the *Antiphony* range, *Al-Jabr* offers additional ways in (and ways out) of the huge masses of radio signal and electro-magnetic noises of the original sources; these strategies include melody, humour and beats; elements not merely grafted on through a lazy, stereotyped remixer's mentality, these are genuine collaborative ideas which push the work into new dimensions. Evan Parker uses melody in 'London's Overthrow', playing an arabic-flavoured piping solo over the throbs of magnetic pulses, and makes a suggested link to the visionary outsider Jonathan Martin (brother of the painter John Martin). This relentless soundtrack to the fiery doom of a capital city is as good an answer-track as we'll get to Clive Graham's London-based *Variations* compilation CDs, and it's another stage in Parker's long-term career of electronics and sax pairings. Jim O'Rourke's quirky jokiness on his short track is welcome, even if you do get the feeling he simply fished a few found samples from his suitcase and stitched this one together rather casually. Simon Fisher Turner uses the beats, but in a way that would cause instant paralysis to any young club-going urbanite who stepped within range; the unexpected shifts within his long piece are magnificently bewildering. The long 'Synaptic radio' track by Tun[k] Systems closes the CD, and along with 'Raxor' by Mechos, it speaks of vast scale and successfully enhances the potent drug-like trances of utter black mysteriousness that is one of Disinformation's strongest points (for me, at any rate)...where the former track is a long submarine voyage into the human psyche more terrifying than the one in H P Lovecraft's

tale 'The Temple', the latter casts the listener in the role of a novice radio-operator posted alone at Ice Station Zebra, helpless while important messages suddenly arrive and your code-book is lost in a storm outside. These are the best tracks here; far from being cosy ambient swaddling cloths, they stir the marrow with unknown terrors. Both of them, I feel, suggest images in sounds which are potent expressions of the isolation of the human condition.

Disinformation continues to exhibit studious preoccupations with radio waves, military research into use of sound, and meteorological phenomena; and has

recently extended its range into using nuclear bunkers for performance sites. The CD booklet here bristles with clues, referring to a 17th century scientist (Robert Hooke) to posit a fascinating take on the integration of mankind's frame with the rhythms of the universe...the motions of the internal parts of bodies' and 'the sound they make'. The all-typo cover this time around eschews the favoured Sound Mirrors imagery - any imagery at all in fact, save that alluded to within the works (eg the paintings of John Martin). With *Al-Jabr*, the science of sound art is developing at an alarming rate, laying claim to disciplines and metaphysical possibilities far outside the paltry ambition of just making another 'weird and noisy' CD for the jaded ears of the world to consume. While this collection may have its experiments that only partially succeed, these glitches are in fact irrelevant when you consider the grand design, the new territories that are being sketched in by Disinformation; the scope of these proposals is, I think you'll find, quite frightening. And a few listens should prompt you into exploring unusual avenues yourself: perhaps seeing connections between the laws of physics, mathematics and sound, and devising new maps of the cities we live in. 'The surgical treatment of fractures...' use this clue as a guide.

ED PINSENT

Marc McNulty

Powdered Iron Rods

GERMANY, PLATE LUNCH PLO5
(1998)

Play this one as loud as you can bear and a forest of these 'iron rods' will grow around you, challenging you to find a way out. It's a haunting and at times somewhat disturbing environment that awaits your ears, and your head. If I've got this right, McNulty is more of a sculptor than a musician, having exhibited his home-made and self-built devices at an art gallery in New York. Other than the clue that he uses 'elements from our pre-atomic days' I've no data as to what his installation-sculptured works are made of. My

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imagination and my ears conjure up something vast, an inescapable network of black metal bars, but in all probability the scale is more manageable. At all events, his sound world is thrillingly inhuman, only occasionally populated with minimal voice and music bursts, emanating from radiosets. McNulty released *Cathepsin* in New York, working under the assumed name Photobia. This one comes in a limited edition metal canister with a poem inside about heavy water. We haven't had a decent post-nuclear holocaust scare in along time, but McNulty's a far way from celebrating the violence of the neutron bomb; his vision seems to focus on an age quite some time after the decimation of the globe and only now, after 500 thousand years, are signs of life beginning to stir. Speculate away. The reality is, I suspect, that the future isn't really grim, just unknowable; unless of course you know how to read the signs, using oracles of art like this one.

ED PINSENT

Noto

Kerne

GERMANY, PLATE LUNCH PL04

(1998)

Extremely minimal electronic constructions by the enigmatic and virtually non-existent Noto. Starts off promisingly with unbearably piercing high tones and fuzzy growls emerging from a robotic background of emptiness; I prefer this opening to the rest of the CD, since when it introduces looped and throbbing rhythms it tends to (for me) mar the effect a smidgen. This way it ends up like a diagrammatic instruction for how to assemble a Techno track, which I suspect is the general idea. Keeping things simple is always good, but after a while you're hankering for more variation in tone; and it's hard for the artist to make his solemn, stereotyped button-pushing and dial-turning seem like much of an achievement. But - you gotta love the utter bleakness of it, a sharp and keening leanness making even Pan Sonic look like fleshy fatties next to this skinny rake of poor hungry waif of a cat, Noto. An endurance test for sure - try it on headphones and stand with your hands against the wall with a black bag over your head, and you're probably recreating the sort of psychological warfare trick they use in countries less fortunate than our own, to give political prisoners a hard time in the isolation tank. Never did you dream, I suspect, that such a pass-time might be considered art or entertainment! Carsten Nicolai is Noto, a sometime gallery artist / fine art painter, and it has so far slipped my attention that he's had a number of releases on his own Noton label, and the Rastermusic label in Germany - another home to recordings of harsh electro tortures I believe. Splendid cover; punched holes in white card, an absurdist reduction of the third Led Zep LP cover. But no hidden images appear when you line it up; nothing, in fact, appears. It looks like a component escaped out of a complex intellectual board game. Even though Noto would always beat you at such a game (he invented the rules after all) it might be worth taking him on just for the heck of it.

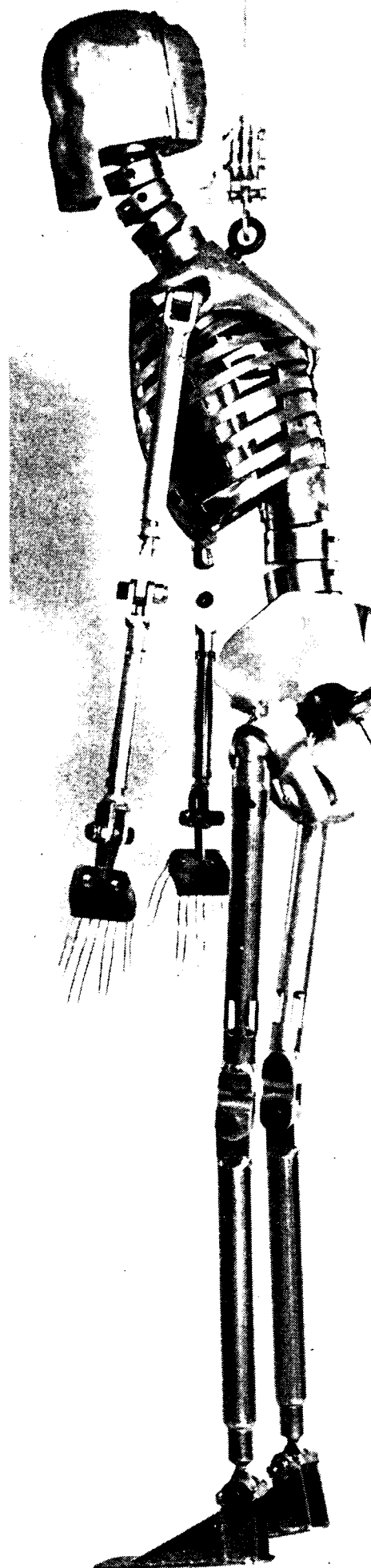
ED PINSENT

I.S.O.

ALCOHOL

RECORDS ALISOD (1999)

A superlative record, this, premium-grade electronic improvised music from the trio of Japanese players led by Otomo Yoshihide. He disbanded Ground-Zero in 1997 only to bounce back with this lethally effective scheme for world music domination, joined by partner and sampler-player Sachiko Matsubara, and Ichiraku Yoshimitsu on percussion and live electronics. This disc is about their most powerful musical statement to date - realised and recorded to afford maximum clarity and focus, through many steely, icy tones, beeps, trills, drones, skips, burrs and thuds. These sounds are made utterly human by the interaction of our three heroes, who are in fact blowing their 'horns' with every bit as much sweat, passion and blood as any hefty jazz tenorman with a 40-inch waistline and lungs to match. But it's not in any way wacky or humorous, like the ruckus Stockhausen and Walkman create when they bring their tape samples and live electronics into the improv arena, rather ISO is about as serious as you can get without actually becoming Iannis Xenakis. What I also find interesting is how Otomo describes this as 'vertical' improvisation - like the best work of Derek Bailey, so intent on exploring that universe of a simple sound that it doesn't feel the need to travel anywhere, but it does build upwards into something utterly unprecedented. Of course, by this new benchmark of quality, a thousand white European bozos who are still defoliating the zones of ambient or electronica might be shown up for the frauds they are. This CD is so heavy metal you could use it to repair the Forth bridge.



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Otomo has been insisting that this project will be seen to be his most important work - and I'll go out on a limb and endorse that statement in triplicate. Believe it or not, you might even find Ground-Zero records slightly tame and frivolous when faced with this ascetic purity; at last Otomo has grown bored with outrage, with shock value and pyrotechnics of turntablism and the motorway pile-up editing style. He's turned to hone his skills in the area of meditative, focused and interactive playing, between three gifted and enlightened souls. And since we're dragging in the spiritual references, yes this is a spiritual record too, and should aid you in constructing that Buddhist Peace garden in your mind you've always been planning to build. The shrine is made of aluminium, with a water fountain of ice-cold vodka, with flowers of steel and leaves of sharp knives...this is ISO.

ED PINSENT

Klangkrieg Das Fieber der menschlichen Stimme BELGIUM, AUDIOVIEW 004 (ND) [1998]

That people actually understand what their tongues are babbling. And that eyes do shine to understand, and that responses are made which indicate a soul in all this matter and mess of tongues and teeth, mouths, cities of stone, rain, heat, cold, the whole wooden mess all the way from Neanderthal grunts to Martian-probe moans of intelligent scientists, nay, all the way from the Johnny Hart ZANG of anteater tongues to the dolorous "la notte, ch'i passai con tanta piete" of Signore Dante in his understood shroud of robe ascending finally to Heaven in the arms of Beatrice.

Jack Kerouac, *Satori In Paris*, New York Grove Press Inc, 1966. p 47.

Modernistic and industrialish, this work includes some severe cut-ups and breakdowns of language, the spoken word, as powerful as those by modern artists who tried it with the written text; I'm thinking of the Lettrists in Paris (a movement of which I admit I know zilch) and concrete poetry, of which I have a couple of books...I think those conceptual weirdos were trying to reduce language to a series of ciphers, and find scintillas of meaning within the very meaninglessness of a single isolated letter, whether printed or spoken...or in any case rearrange the broken fragments to spell out a new fiery message. If language managed to reconstitute itself into a form of coherent prose, the techniques of William Burroughs (who I've never read) would do something to shatter it again. Then again, another antecedent might be the *Ur-Sonata* of Kurt Schwitters...this just shows how glibly I can bring in arty references, without knowing what the hell I'm getting into...

'The fever of the human voice', as this work translates, comprises nine pieces derived from processing of, er, the human voice. It can range from the soothing sounds of a snoring man, to amplified breathing, and heavy sighs; and occasional passages of speech distorted through a tiny telephone receiver, or looped into patterns of gibberish, or fragmented into 'completely atomized digits'. The few recognizable bits of speech (in German) have the tone of a dispassionate lecturer, or TV announcer reading a dull weather report; this may relate to the artists' suggestion that you 'cut out an emotionless face of the news paper and stick it to the wall in front of you' while listening. Aiming for that level of mundane inertness. In the same way that concrete poetry evolved out of the technology of hand-composed type, this preoccupation with the timbres of the human voice is clearly the provenance of men obsessed with microphones and recording technology.

In fact, this work attains the level of sublime musicality more than once; on 'Flieger in Grosse spirale' where the glutinous whirlings of looped voices, soothing electronic musical tones, found environmental sounds and

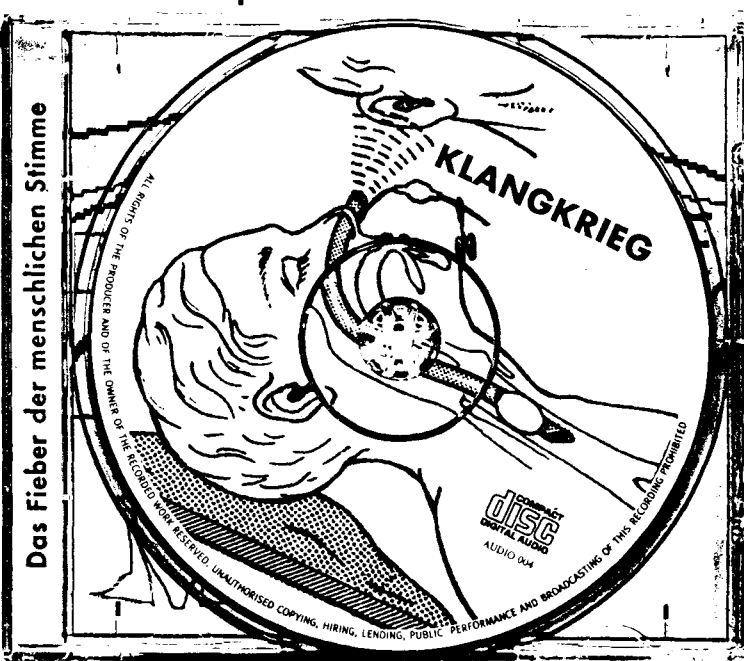
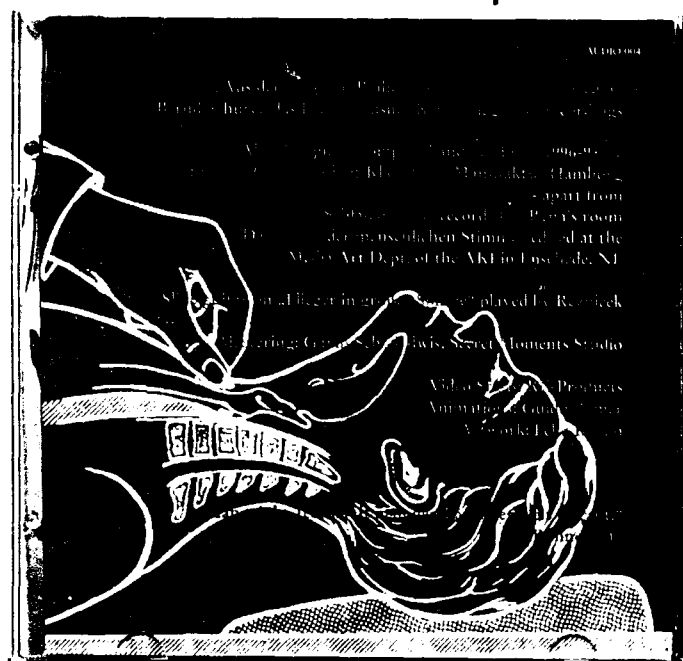
manipulative treatments accumulate to the perfect point where they attain a symphonic flood-release of emotion. Elsewhere, another booming voice is rendered down to such heavy tones that any words are unrecognisable; it's become a talking bass guitar. The occurrence of the voice within these alienating worlds begins to provide pockets of warmth; where the episodes appear to be simply close-miked environmental clutter, they suggest a drab domesticity and claustrophobia. It's like spending an afternoon trapped in the house of a total stranger.

Felix Knoth and Tim Buhre are the two electro-acoustic carvers of sound who formed Klangkrieg in 1987. Besides releasing records, they've been active in making art installations, one of which (from a Copenhagen festival) yielded this CD as an outcropping. These guys claim to be equally inspired by 'brutality and introspection' and perceive no real differences between biology and technology. Yep, it's the familiar man-machine trope once again - which has been cropping up in 20th century art since the Futurists onwards, and Klangkrieg are only a hair's breadth from reprising Kraftwerk's pop-art version of same, but there's still a lot to recommend their particular spin on the motif.

ED PINSENT

Ryoji Ikeda Mort Aux Vaches STAALPLAAT, NO NUMBER CD

Another good one from that notable Japanese minimalist Ryoji Ikeda. In case you're wondering why there are so many CDs all called *Mort Aux Vaches*, it refers to a series of modern electronic works commissioned for an avant-garde Dutch radio project called VPRO. The resulting products are then packaged in imaginative ways (for example with the discs secured to card covers with brass paper-fasteners) and distributed over mainland Europe and the UK by a



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Out Now on Camera Obscura:

CAM016CD – Rake – "Resume the Cosmos"
 CAM017CD – Salamander – "Red Mantra"
 CAM018CD – The Lothars – "Meet the Lothars"
 CAM019CD – Alphane Moon – "The Echoing Grove"
 CAM020CD – The Green Pajamas – "All Clues Lead to Meagan's Bed"

CAM021CD – Abunai! – Mystic River Sound
 CAM022S – The Green Pajamas "Best Times" 7"
 CAM023CD – Gentle Tasaday – "From the Mind's Eye..."
 CAM024CD – Vortex Navigation Co – "Things Make Patterns"

Should be out by the time you read this:

Coming mid-year - Jeff Kelly 4-CD box set "Melancholy Sun", containing the albums "Coffee in Nepal", "Portugal", "Private Electrical Storm" and the unreleased "Rosary and the house of Jade". Then the "Serotonin Ronin II" compilation, new albums from Tadpoles, Primordial Undermind, and the Black Sun Ensemble.

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consortium of weirdo-indie steadfasts. Here, Ryoji turns in a remix of his '+/-' piece already released by Touch last year, plus one new 17 minute piece; nobody could accuse Ikeda of producing too much too soon. It was produced for some Art Installation of his called *Just About Now* (he's something of a multi-media guy - also connected with the art theatre troupe Dumb Type).

You needs must admire the stark clarity of his very precise tones - they're focussed to a pinpoint intensity. It's like he's some vicious miniature spider with stainless steel legs, running around inside your head. The 'headphonics' tag applied to this material is no empty boast - much of the time the sounds appear to originate right in the centre of your scone, and emanate therefrom in strange pulsing waves of electro-magnetic energy, capable of killing all known life forms within a five foot radius. If we could construct a CD player that fits inside our bodies - but then, you don't want to hear the end of a sentence that begins like that! This is a futuristic package in semi-textured plastic, and mass-produced in a way that it looks totally unlike any household object you'd ever remotely associate with music.

ED PINSENT



Rehberg and Bauer Ballt.

TOUCH TO:39 (1999)

This is by the low-profile Viennese musicians Peter Rehberg and Ramon Bauer, and it's another essential one to check out if you want to garner some clues in your capacity as a serious student of developments in computer-based music. With technology becoming so commonplace now, I find myself observing colleagues foundering amongst the tools of the modern office. Most regular folks seriously underuse their PCs, even unaware of the most basic capabilities of word processing software. It's fear and ignorance that keeps us from using the computer as more than a clever typewriter. Naturally, we're afraid of becoming the other extreme from that - a computer nerd, a techie, an Internet freak. Maybe the thing is not to be overwhelmed by technology, to the point of not even thinking about it. To assist you with an instant demystification, play this CD.

Ballt. amounts to an artistic investigation of the computer world, which means it's fuelled by the power of imagination. Rehberg and Bauer dream of the inside of a hard drive, the unexplored surface of a floppy disc or the near-invisible connections on a printed circuit - and they have no respect for the software whatsoever. They know computers are silly and they could turn their processes inside out if they had to, by simply wishing it to happen. The Bogeyman of Technology Gone Insane starts to tumble to the ground.

Though minimal enough, this music is quite unlike that of Pan Sonic, being as how it's more driven and (at times) quite angry music, suggesting an intense overloading of circuits and multi-tasking of processors that aren't quite up to the task. As these two clinical surgeons snip and carve, the shrieks of machinery become music. The Futurists would celebrate the glories of the machinery driving a fast car, but these late 20th century Viennese monsters could care less - and exhibit their indifference by making great music almost as an afterthought. Interestingly, it seems that computer software for making music is 'framed in the language of graphic design' - so powerbook music like this is achieved by wiping away the user-friendly graphic interface and finding the real interior under the surface. By pointing and dragging, a new form of graphic score is realised, and with instant playback too as the belly of the computer screams and howls its objections.

An enjoyable listen too, by the way - it's not just modernistic for the sake of it. Such stimulating surfaces and heart-ripping dynamics...one second it's sub-atomic particle-sized bleeps, the next it's a titanic tidal wave ROAR of cataclysmic dimensions. But entirely coherent; you can almost size up the squares, triangles and circles of sound as they pour out of the speakers into your awaiting mitts.

ED PINSENT



ECM 323 IS THE NAME GIVEN TO THE PROJECT STARTED BY Northampton-based artist Barry Nichols, with his companion Linden Hale - a musical theorist and academic. Barry Nichols started off more interested in somewhat more conventional music. He began experiments under the name Action Concret, collecting field recordings and chance recordings, to be used as the basis for tape compositions; activities which resulted in a cassette-only issue called *Isolation Studies*, jointly executed with Toy Bizarre. But he soon found himself in a familiar artistic cul-de-sac, painfully aware of other experiments by *Musique Concrète* predecessors, and felt that he could never do anything original in this particular field. A deliberate decision was made to discontinue the project.

He began to investigate the physical nature of sound itself. Right away he found himself embroiled in an enormous web of related scientific studies, in many complex fields and disciplines, too many to express with one project. At this time, I think, he hooked up with Linden Hale and formally began ECM 323 together. They began to set up sound experiments wherever they could, usually in art galleries, to demonstrate the fascinating physical properties of sound that he had re-discovered for himself, and attempted to pull together all the diverse strands of his related research by publishing texts to go with the works. These texts are crammed with ideas, many flying off at strange tangents, and along with the sound works are as much an exhortation to the reader to try and find out more for themselves - rather than having all the ideas laid before one instantly, like a mug of Cup-Of-Soup.

One of his interests is in how sound might manifest itself on our sensory apparatus as something other than through the ears, ie sounds you can see (wave patterns in sand on metal plates, disruptions in a flame); and sounds you can feel (vibrations in your nervous system).

ECM 323 projects resist commodification. To begin with, a lot of the work involves infrasound, which can't actually be presented to an audience in any shape or form; and the works are best presented in an auditorium or gallery setting with proper equipment - including a good PA system. Not only don't they transfer well to CD, in a lot of cases they don't transfer at all. For this reason, ECM 323 is not intended as a band you can see playing live at a regular gig, nor does it generate

user-friendly merchandise for home consumption.

This may come over like some form of art snobbery, but you have to admire the uncompromising stance. It presents a problem for the listener of course, as it did for this writer; creator Barry Nichols chose to send me his literature first, through the mail. Only after a deal of persuasion (and a nudge from Joe Banks) did he see fit to send me some tapes; and this very reluctantly, with many caveats and

conditions. I hope I have represented these fears correctly above; I feel they are partially legitimate. But *The Sound Projector* deal is this: with any music, I have to hear the sounds first - if and when they move me, then I have motivation to want to find out more. I listen first, ask questions second.

All but one of the tape excerpts I heard relates to a specific 'Test Site'. Accompanying these Sites are pages of explanatory texts, which at first I have to say I found rather infuriating. They refer to all manner of far-flung and complex scientific ideas about physics and acoustics - and other apparently unrelated subjects - but in a rather cursory way. It's as though Hale is almost expecting us to be as familiar as he is with the works of Ernst Chladni, Hans Jenny and Robert Monroe; and the fields of Cymatics, Biofeedback Training, or infrasound. But I changed my mind when I heard the powerful and intriguing sounds on the tapes. Portions of the texts which I didn't understand - or felt I disagreed with - are traceable within my questions. There is no denying Nichols is serious about his work, and at the end of it he doesn't purport to be more than an artist who's interested in science. We need more people to open themselves up to the possibility of inter-disciplinary work, so all power to ECM 323. The interview below took place by e-mail.



Introductory

EP I have read your ECM Test Sites booklet. I think I've understood some of it! Two areas I remain unclear are (a) whether you're referring to experiments carried out by yourself, or experiments conducted by others that you have read about; and (b) how the research connects to your actual output.

BN In reply to these questions - (a) In part, some of the booklet overviews our experiments with the sensitive flame, chladni plates, and generating oscillons in water and granular materials, (the installations *Trace*, *Intraference*, and *Hourground* all alluded to these experiments), also, as mentioned, we have taken the work of Chladni, Jenny, and Dr Manners, and either re-presented it, recontextualised it, (with an aesthetic leaning!) or taken it a stage further in terms of it being an R&D project.

Other aspects of the booklet which deal with Infrasound, unstruck sounds and other phenomena related to sound etc, are related to the wider aspects of sound as a material medium. As I said in the introduction, it became quite apparent that as soon as we started investigating acoustic phenomena in order to incorporate it in some ways into our work, that we started to stumble upon a wealth of material which was too compelling to ignore, and as a result, we were in many ways led into areas that, although deeply interested us, could not be presented publicly (infrasound is notoriously difficult to work with in terms of public safety.) It therefore became

"Beautiful Fluid Geometries"



The work of ECM 323

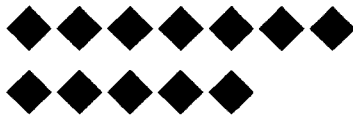
By ED PINSENT



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necessary to make this information available in other ways, yet still maintaining it as part of our oeuvre. (hence the CD ROM project).

In answer to your question (b) - a great deal of what we research will in some ways manifest itself through our recorded and installation works (albeit with a degree of artistic license), but as in all artistic ventures, we strive to produce something which is both interesting, beautiful, and informative. This is in part where our opinion is slightly at a tangent to Peter Hodgkinson, in that we have occasionally presented work, which is essentially a re-production of an existing scientific experiment or phenomena - to us, this in no way invalidates the artistic process, as we have made our work into a kind of illustration of our ideas, without laying claim to it as our own.



Questions Specific to THE ENTELECHY TEST SITE, TS 03

The complete version of this is a 90 minute Installation piece, complete with video monitor flashing a pulsing signal (a red screen) and oscilloscope giving a visual readout - both in time with the sound source. This is a near-monotonous electronic drone that is attuned to the electrical patterns of our brain waves. Hence it has the power to affect the way human beings think and behave - a process called 'entrainment'. This can be a beneficial or healing process (one viewer at the Museum of Installation was at first scared, then utterly charmed...she closed her eyes, repeated a mantra to herself and felt she was floating off her chair!) But there may be a darker side too. Says Hale, 'The US Military have experimented to some degree with entrainment techniques as part of their Less Than Lethal weapons programme...they have allegedly developed a technology based on microwave carrier frequencies which can disable or disorientate enemies or undesirables.'

EP The tape sounds good. Very relaxing. I like the way it keeps changing as I somehow expected it might remain more static throughout. Why does it keep changing? What is producing the changes - your artistic manipulation of the materials?

BN It's interesting that you thought that the soundtrack might remain more static, presumably because it is primarily rhythm based. However, some of the ideas behind *Entelechy* are designed to take the listener through a range of mood states, so we use a range of frequencies which can trigger these responses, as we will explain later. To

a great extent, yes we are producing the changes, and controlling the dynamics, although the way we work often allows for a degree of serendipity. This particular piece focuses on material sourced from the body, its rhythms and oscillations, so we mixed these sounds into the binaural foundation track.

EP If this Entelechy project is something to do with affecting the human brain, then it strikes me that at least half of the experiment might usefully be devoted to monitoring the responses of the audience in some way. Have you ever done this, and if not why not?

BN First of all, it is essential for us to explain that the work is not intended to be an experiment in mind control! To understand our work, you have to understand that we are first and foremost, artists. We take our inspiration from physics and physically proven concepts in order to give the work more depth, and resonance. Make no mistake, we're not dilettante. There are a

huge amount of artists out there who are doing great work, but we see so little contemporary art that really and truly moves us; and not strictly in the emotional sense, but a genuine move from point 'a' to point 'b' - a learning curve; a process which requires a lot of effort on the part of the listener to be actively involved. Our installations are probably best likened to seminars, whereby there is a genuine exchange of ideas and information between us and the audience. In terms of monitoring audience response there is no need, as there is already a wealth of scientific research being conducted on human response to binaural rhythms, entrainment, and hemispheric synchronisation.¹ We are simply using these pre-determined frequencies to induce an enhanced state of mind, which to a receptive individual can be an extremely potent way of accessing areas of cognition not readily achievable in the day-to-day grind of modern life. Interestingly, Plato noted in his *Timaeus*, the importance of rhythm, which he saw as a 'heaven-sent ally in reducing to order and harmony any disharmony in the revolutions within us'.

EP Have you ever tried this test site on yourself? La Monte Young had a room in his 'dream house' where a constant tone is played - he lives by the drone. Do you have a test site at home, and have you found it has improved your own facilities for relaxation, creativity and intuition? Again, how can this be measured in a meaningful way - what performance indicators could be used?

BN (Laughs) - We have probably lived with this soundtrack for much longer than we should have! I don't know much about La Monte Young's home life, but I would imagine that he has discovered a sympathetic tone that energises him in some way - we have worked closely with Dr Peter Manners whose Cymatics techniques utilise programmed soundwaves to stimulate or destroy particular cells or organs of the body, which basically amounts to the same thing and it works. Yes, Linden particularly has been experimenting with binaural frequencies, over a much greater range than we have shown within the scope of *Entelechy*. I suppose the truly defining moment was when myself, Linden, and his wife all sat under headphones with one of our friends, Alistair Fruish, who coincidentally had some binaural frequency generating software. We sat for about two hours, with little or no conversation as everyone was swept through a range of states from deep relaxation, to moments of pure revelation, sleep, and auditory hallucination! It was at this point that we realised what a fascinating phenomenon this is, and further examination has thrown up some amazing insights into entrainment and FFR (Frequency Following Response). In a sense the performance indicators which you refer to are all around us - at a fundamental level - in the home and in the environment in general. You need look no further than film soundtracks, dance music, and the soundtracks from popular computer games to realise that entrainment techniques are being used on us to great effect all the time. Excitement levels are brought to a climax as musical rhythms gently move us from a normal heartbeat, to one that extends to



¹ Notably at the Monroe Institute.

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excitement, and in certain instances, fear or a sense of foreboding². In scientific terms, most particularly within the branch of Neurotherapy, binaural frequencies are of particular use in the treatment of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), Depression, Schizophrenia, and OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), where the published results demonstrate the benefits of binaural frequencies. In most observed cases, the technique has shown that its results persist well after treatment, and has more prolonged benefits than pharmacological alternatives.

EP I find the proposition that all energy can be 'broken down' into waveforms to be reductionist. I feel you are making two basic assumptions about nature, and human beings in particular: (a) that human beings are no more than passive receptors for these waveforms, and that our biological functions are no more than sophisticated machinery; (b) we all receive these waves the same way and react the same way to them. Don't you think humans have souls?

BN To answer your question with a question, surely in order to comprehend anything there is that basic necessity to break it down into its component parts? When we began the whole project ECM 323, we realised that we would have to adopt a much wider step than our peers, and set ourselves the task of examining every aspect of sound that interested us, and to attempt to 'get inside' sound in ways that other artists (and I stress the word Artists), have rarely explored. It is a biological fact that human beings are no more than the sum of many millions of parts, cells, organisms etc, all acting in concert to enable us to function. Looked at holistically, we have our own will and volition, and yes a soul if you like, but only if all of the necessary components are functioning correctly, and in the right order. Further reductionism takes all matter to the level of vibration - all matter, when sufficiently reduced, is vibration. Put another way, everything 'rings' at a particular frequency. All of our physical functions can be attributed to waves, oscillations, cycles, rhythms, (peristalsis, heartbeat, orgasm, respiration for instance) so in some ways, yes, our biological functions are highly sophisticated machinery. The human brain operates over a range of defined wavelengths (alpha, beta, delta, theta), so we are to an extent 'slaves' to our biological imperative. We used the word *Entelechy* for our installation very deliberately. Very simply, the theory of entelechy implies that a non-material causal factor acts upon every living system, directing physical processes (e.g. - regulation, regeneration, reproduction) towards a purpose or goal. We in turn have implied that this factor might be sound, or more precisely - vibration, and have created the installation in order to focus the listener upon these visceral rhythms and oscillations, and to perhaps consider this proposition from an internal perspective. The other three Test Sites installations extend this hypothesis by using sound to order physical materials in beautiful and

unique ways. So not only are we creating a work of art, but we are also on something of a crusade too!

EP Why is this experiment undertaken within an art gallery / sound installation context, and not in a laboratory? The former seems to have little or no controlled conditions (eg significant variables such as available PA equipment, size and acoustics of venue, states of mind of the audience). What does the experiment demonstrate? Are its results repeatable under laboratory conditions?

BN We are constantly presented with the dichotomy between presenting a work of art as an aesthetic experience, and realising a theory of physics as an experimental test-bed. We have never really resolved this problem satisfactorily, and in most cases attempt to encompass both of these needs to the best of our ability. Up to this point, however, we have only been able to present installations which either illustrate an existing theory or hypothesis, or which in some ways allude to, and extend the work of others. So in answer to your question, most of the lab work has already been done - we are constantly researching our chosen area, and anything relevant is incorporated into our oeuvre. With *Entelechy* in particular, we have selected frequencies which have a known beneficial effect, and the potential for variables is slight. A particularly receptive listener will become entrained fairly quickly, and is likely to experience deep relaxation, and perhaps some form of mild auditory hallucination, which we have built in deliberately (we are especially interested in Audio Scene Analysis). There is nothing in the soundtrack which we have not experienced ourselves many times over, and the overall effects are greatly enhanced when we exclude any un-necessary external visual stimuli, and introduce a synchronised flicker from a strobe light. With that in mind, I suppose the effects and certainly human response to binaurals, are repeatable when these criteria are applied. Of course, most of what we do is largely 'work in progress', so the overall process is constantly evolving and unfolding as we investigate certain phenomena - that's what keeps it alive and vital.



Specific to INTRAFERENCE, TS 04, the video test site

This is 'work in progress'. It explores the possibility of using video feedback as a source for soundtracks. Other experiments in this area show how patterns can be generated on a screen just by using video feeding back on itself. The geometric and psychedelic patterns that result from this process are visually stunning, although aurally somewhat less so.

ECM 323 are doing *Intraference*, *Trace* and *Entelechy* at The Museum Of Installation, Deptford From 30th June - 24th July 1999 as part of their Day For Night festival. ECM 323 will be in the main building, and will be doing a seminar towards the end of the run (dates T.B.C.). They are launching their CD-ROM *0 Hz* at Sonar in Barcelona from 17th-19th June, and a UK launch again at MOI on Tuesday 29th June 6-9pm, where they will also be available to answer questions. The ROM also features Disinformation, T:un[k] Systems, and Host Productions.

EP Please clarify - is there, or will there be, any sort of visual component to this installation? If the audience is able to 'interpret visual input as auditory output', does this mean there's some sort of sense-swapping, synaptic process involved? Or could you simply turn off the video monitor and still generate the feedback sounds?

BN Yes, there is very much a visual element to the installation - our key collaborator in *Intraference* is Barry Hale, a film maker and video artist who generated the 'live' video feedback imagery. We position a series of contact mikes across a monitor screen which are sensitive enough to pick up minute fluctuations in screen luminance, colour and shapes, and a form of chaotic soundscape is created. The whole installation evolved from one of those divine moments of synchronicity - I was basically researching non-linear systems, whilst at the same time experimenting with sources of sound which might be obtained from the electron bombardment of a standard TV screen. I was experimenting with colour fields and became very excited by the fact that subtle changes on screen could yield interesting audible signals. Barry happened to be experimenting with video feedback, and it became obvious to bring the two elements together as a perfect example of an audible chaotic system. The images are incredible, and exhibit the typical behaviour expected from a non-linear dynamic system.

EP Does this site connect in anyway to the field of video installation art? This (relatively) new development in gallery art has often been associated with conceptualists and minimalists, but no matter how conceptual or minimal there has often been a great deal of content to the imagery they choose. If Intraference has imagery, is it meaningful - or is the entire installation an example of pure process art?

BN If anything, the installation could loosely be interpreted as conceptual, but we are keen not to align ourselves with an art 'movement' or 'tag' as such. This isn't out of a sense of snobbery, nor a stab at cultural elitism, it is simply a matter of fact that we are attempting to illustrate audible phenomena within an aesthetic context. Again, the world of contemporary art has for so long been loaded with indulgent self-referentialism, which is of no interest to us whatsoever. On the subject of content - that's an ambiguous question. I would like to think that we have produced a body of work which presents natural, or naturally occurring systems at work. It becomes more 'meaningful' the deeper you delve, but initially you are confronted with an extremely beautiful, organic, fractal sound and image environment.

² The central rhythmic theme for the film *Jaws* is a classic example of entrainment.

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EP Please, how do we get from processed video feedback to biological morphogenesis? I thought the latter was something to do with the generative process of plant cells. Could you explain the connection, please!

BN This is where our work attempts to establish tangible causal connections between very different disciplines. Morphogenesis is not only applied to plant cells, it is a dynamic system which is applied to all biological forms, from cells to human society in general. If you have ever read Rupert Sheldrake's *A New Science of Life*, he posits the theory of Morphic Resonance - a process of action at a distance in both space and time which governs natural form and the overall behaviour of forms and systems. It takes no great leap of imagination to see the connection with a video feedback system which relies for its existence upon nothing more than an evolutionary cycle of looped input and output. The system literally feeds from itself and 'bootstraps' into existence all of these flowing organic forms and images. In this sense, video feedback is a form-building dynamic system, which occurs with little external intervention. This is of course an extremely simplistic explanation, but hopefully goes some way to explaining our intentions. As an addition, we extended the concept of feedback last year at the South London Gallery, in a performance of electronic feedback using SLG's sound system as a source. The system exhibits exactly the same characteristics as video feedback, except that it is a literal acoustic interpretation of the phenomenon, which can be extremely powerful, and primal in some ways.

EP What is a space-time simulator? Are you aiming to emulate some sort of time-travel with this work?

BN No, I'm not Doctor Who! There is a slight problem with interpretation here, so put more succinctly, a video feedback system is an experimental system which exhibits spatial, and temporal dynamics. In scientific terms it can be used as a model for what is known as a dissipative system - energy flows through the system and is lost to microscopic degrees of freedom over a period of time. James Crutchfield did a lot of work and research in this field in the early 1980's, and wrote the definitive paper, 'Space-Time Dynamics in Video Feedback' in 1984, and Ralph Abraham of the Visual Math Institute, Santa Cruz, California has sent us a wealth of material related to the subject which pre-empt's our work by more than 20 years, and he has hugely influenced our recent research.



Specific to TRACE, TS 02

This installation uses test tones to generate geometric patterns in water. This one I think has a pretty big wow-factor with the audience. At the Museum of Installation one viewer had pretty much taken up residence at the site, entranced by the compelling wave forms appearing 'out of nowhere' on the surface of an oil drum full of water.

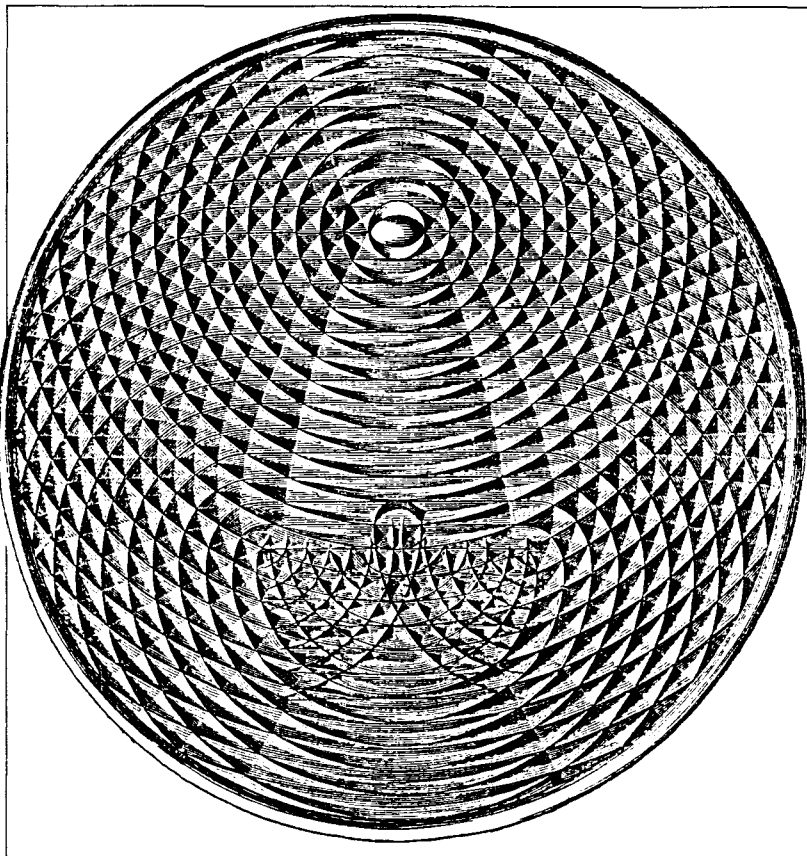
EP Geometric patterns - well, it sounds plausible. With this work, are you generating them out of nowhere, or where they there all along and you're just making them visible? Where do these patterns inhere when the experiment takes place - in the water, in the air, in the sound? What do the patterns mean, what does it tell us about nature?

BN *Trace* is perhaps the most successful of our installations because it illustrates an acoustic phenomenon very simply, and with simple materials. It always elicits a fascinating response from people whenever we show it, and most of them are transfixed by the hypnotic quality of the material. When pure sine tones are passed through a thin membrane of water, beautiful fluid geometries are revealed in the form of radiating hexagons, squares, and sinusoidal waves. We did a tremendous amount of research after stumbling across the phenomenon, and discovered that pioneers of acoustics and vibratory physics such as Ernst Chladni, Hans Jenny, Mary Waller, and most recently, Ralph Abraham, had come up with similar experimental results. *Trace* perfectly exhibits the potential of sound to order physical materials (the experiment also works on fine particulates such as sand, and viscous liquids), and we can draw a correlation between these fluid patterns and those which occur through many levels of nature, such as crystals, honeycomb, snowflakes, cells, star systems. I recently spoke with Professor Jan Einasto, a cosmologist based in Estonia who spoke of a 'honeycomb theory' of the universe, and who did similar experiments in the early 1970's to prove his hypothesis.

EP As to sonic warfare, I first heard of this in the Tape Delay book (1987) - interestingly,

variations on the theme of some form of the damage that sound could inflict were proposed quite separately by David Tibet, Coil and Cabaret Voltaire. (This may have been a tendency of the author of that book, Charles Neal). John Cale wanted to vibrate buildings apart with amplified sound; Lou Reed would broadcast inaudible signals into an audience and watch fights break out. And Joe Banks continues to research the history of military application of this. All of these viewpoints seem (to me) very alarming and aggressive. Where are you coming from on this angle?

BN I don't think we can add much more to any of the work being done by Joe Banks, whose recordings and research are tremendously exciting and comprehensive in this area. We have established an interest in non-lethal applications of sound within the military, simply because we have a fascination with all aspects of sound and audition. From a personal standpoint, I accept the inevitability of human nature to exploit anything which has the potential to destroy. There is, however an awful lot of mythology concerned with sound weapons, notably with Infrasound and ELF waves. There is little tangible evidence to suggest that weapons of this type have, or ever will be used within the crucible of war, although the whole subject is obviously cloaked in secrecy and misinformation. The Russians were apparently subtly pulsing ELF frequencies at target townships in Arizona - known as the 'Woodpecker' project. Victims were allegedly afflicted with prolonged bouts of nausea, confusion, and the inability to concentrate,

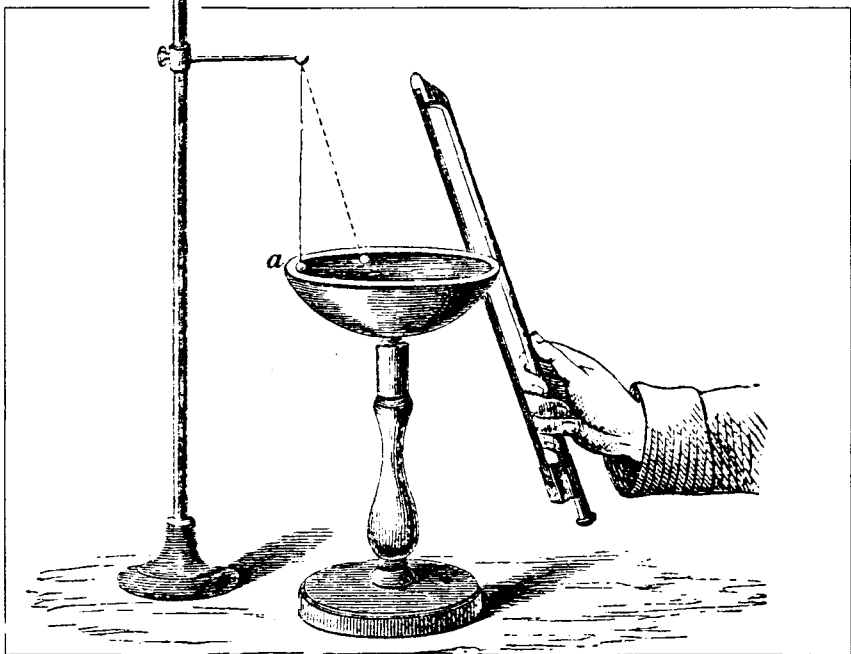


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however this is difficult to prove scientifically, as these symptoms could be attributed to other external environmental phenomena such as leaking gases, food poisoning, etc. I think I am perhaps more interested in the positive aspects of sound and am very interested in the work of Dr Peter Manners whom I met last year. He utilises the destructive characteristics of sound frequencies as an aid within medicine for destroying malignant cells; the technique, known as Cymatics or 'energetic resonance' has attracted a massive amount of attention, and Manners claims to already have access to 21st century sonic healing technology.

EP Trace says something about the exterior application of sound within the physical universe; contrasted with Entelechy which says something about the interior application of sound within man's inner space. Discuss.

BN I think the two are inextricably linked. 'As above, so below' - so says the Hermetic tradition. This 'Anthropic Principle' extends to the realm of golden ratios, sacred geometry, and harmony. The same proportions which govern the spatial distribution of matter also govern the distances between notes of the harmonic series (which underlies the theory of resonance). These relationships can be scaled down to the subatomic level (superstrings), and up to the level of solar systems, and possibly galaxies (Kepler). Linden's work as a composer and lecturer has brought a tremendous amount to ECM 323, and through him, I have gained a much wider perspective on the world of sound, music, and the sound environment. He is particularly interested in the work of Robert Lawlor, and his work with Sacred Geometry. Lawlor traces these links back to Pythagoras and beyond, as does Berendt in his book *The World is Sound*. Fractal Geometry demonstrates that highly complex chaotic systems possess layers of dramatically different scale that contain 'connectedness', or 'self-similarity'. Therefore, the mind and body of man, and the nature of the external material world both have a fundamental commonality in that they both follow rhythmic patterns operating at highly defined frequencies. We have been fascinated by the potential of sound, and something in me keeps taking me back to origins and sources in order to gain a greater understanding of the nature of sound. Our first prosodic exchanges with our mothers, and experiences in the womb are primarily sound-based, so in a sense, our whole being, our whole model of the world is right from the very beginning, established through sound. So little wonder then, that we are instinctively drawn to sound, and locate ourselves in the world primarily through audition. 'The Big Bang', and 'In the beginning was the word', are two phrases out of many, which for me, indicate these links to sonic origins.



Specific to CONVERGENCE extracts

Realised in the summer of 1998 and not part of the Test Site series. I enjoyed this one - very good, the most 'musical' yet! In fact these tapes have been remixed and interpreted as music by Andy Gracie of Host Productions.

EP This experiment seems less intent on 'proving' something, and more of an aesthetic undertaking - the sounds deployed simply for the sake of 'interesting and potent acoustic moires' - very exciting. Since you as artists decide what counts as interesting and potent, this is much more of an artistic gesture than a purely scientific one. I'd imagine you're not going to dispute this, but perhaps you can elaborate! The most evocative sounds on the tape you sent, I was freely associating (as I do with most music) in a way I couldn't with the others. I think of the Structuralist Cinema of the 1970s - not saying their aesthetic stance is one I would endorse, but some of them became real control freaks. They wanted a cinema image so transparent that it would be virtually impossible for the audience to do anything but concentrate on the processes of film (and not be seduced by stories, entertainment, or anything associated with mainstream cinema). Would you seek to deny, or at least reduce, the level of such free association from the audience, and insist on the primacy of the pure sound?

BN Great question Ed! - *Convergence* was really one of those personal excursions which you correctly identify as a purely creative exercise - it does have a kind of *raison d'être*, but not one that I would readily incorporate into our installation work. I was really keen to try and make something more 'musical', and used subtle (and not so subtle!) feedback techniques to generate most of the soundtrack. However, on this occasion, I was keen to reduce the amount of human intervention as much as possible, and see what could be achieved by combining harmonic and dissonant frequencies. Peter Hodgkinson of T:un[k] Systems kindly allowed me to use some of his equipment, and also contributed his critical compositional skills to the whole album. Another idea was to create foundational soundtracks which could be 'added on to'. The title *Convergence* suggests a merging of waves and signals, so it acts like a bead of condensation upon which other signals may accumulate. I have sent copies to Peter and also Andy Gracie of Host Productions, both of whom are highly talented digital composers, and now have the unenviable task of reworking my original sounds! This may see the light of day as a release one day, if some brave and visionary record label makes it possible. We are actively taking time out at the end of the year to concentrate more on recorded work, and to extend the creative elements of our research. I agree with you that this is our most listenable work from the batch you have, although a lot of our early experimental recordings were constructed along these lines also.

Your analogy with Structuralist Cinema is a good one, and I think that both myself and Linden would encourage any form of free association from our audience. We like to lead people into an area which interests us, but of course like most works of art, there is an element of interpretation to be brought from the viewer as well as the artist. The purity of presentation in most of our installations and recordings, we believe will lead people who are open to the work through a network of connections, associations, and evolutions leading to many of the ideas discussed above and perhaps formulating their own responses. We welcome these responses - hence, the seminar. We are continually surprised at how we make the same connections, independently of each other. Perhaps the nature of 'pure sound' will focus the listener in certain ways. Feedback in particular, and in general, extremely high frequencies have pejorative associations which immediately alienate people, despite the fact that identical frequencies emanate from our nervous systems. Perhaps that is precisely what they are afraid of? Audiences will inevitably make their own association (as you did), in spite of any actions on our part.

³ Incidentally, the number '323' in our name is representative of self-similar chaos, being born out of the highly significant number 23, and its inversion.

Various Artists

**Antitrade: An Ash
International
Compilation
ASH INTERNATIONAL
[RIP] ASH 4.1 (1999)**

Another cryptic and intriguing patchwork quilt of compiled sounds and featured artists from the Touch and Ash rosters; in a way making samplers is what this label does best, because you're guaranteed a really fine collection of curios and oddities in sound that you probably won't come across any other place. And there's genius at work behind the combinations here; whoever sequences the tracks and compiles the notes and designs the sleeve art is very shrewd and clever, leaking out minimalist clues here and misdirecting the eye and brain there. Fragments, puzzles and mysteries can enhance your life, if you keep these cabalistic signs visible and audible at all times.

Radio collages by hhh are interspersed between the 'principal' tracks; these are collaborations between Florian Hecker, Holger Hiller, and label boss Mike Harding. They feature shortwave buzzing, tones, telephone dialling, and a deeply chilling female voice reading off numbers which might be a numbers station, or perhaps the speaking clock in another language? Hazard soars in with a up-tempo wave-throbber of a piece which is more alarming than his somewhat gelatinous CD; there's a Blue Peter-styled experiment with a home-made battery from Disinformation, and more moody X-Files gibberish from S.E.T.I. His joke is already wearing a bit thin with me after less than one year; it seems little more than filler Ambient soundscaping with the Alien-paranoia samples tacked onto it.

The field recording by Alpha Echo Romeo, from a garden shrine in Tokyo, just might scoop the gold cup - it's a living breathing example of Chris Watson's observation that 'There are links between the spirits within certain places and our feelings and appreciation of them.' In fact it's rather better than Jon Wozencroft's straight recording of Guy Fawkes Night from Primrose Hill in 1987; this sounds like any other Guy Fawkes Night anywhere in the UK. Strangely what comes over strongest from this is the twee, middle-class smugness of the mums and dads twittering away

THE *DISC*-URATOR'S DEN incorporates

[A] regular discs; [B] the Recommended corner; [C] "heighten the sense of unease"; [D] nice melodic pop music

☼ RECORDS ARE OUR JUG OF
LAVAZZA ESPRESSO COFFEE ☼

to their offspring; but it's a useful, sociological aural document and snapshot of British life nonetheless.

Bruce Gilbert turns in a perplexing tape of what sounds like someone flicking the pages of an enormous book - say Volume XII of the Oxford English Dictionary. After spinning this, I still have a question-mark permanently affixed over my head, although chiefly 'cause I fail to see why and how this relates to the 'extraordinary found recordings' that Gilbert was sent by Daniel Menche. But perhaps I'm barking up the wrong Banyan.

Title refers to anti-commodity war that this label is single-handedly waging against the mindless consumption of music. We are all, somehow, implicated even just by the act of walking into the Virgin megastore.

ED PINSENT

King Missile Mystical Shit / Fluting On The Hump

**USA, SHIMMYDISC SHM -
SO29 (RE-RELEASE) (1999)**

King Missile represent the best and the worst of 'quirky' alt.rock from the USA. They've deserved better than butt naked emperors like Pavement but have always managed to cock it up for themselves with forced line-up changes and a nagging inconsistency that has dogged their every move. They originally stumbled into fame when tracks like 'Take Stuff From Work' and 'Jesus Was Way Cool' (both featured on this re-issue of their

first 2 albums) became college radio favourites but they never managed to capitalise on their initial promise and subsequent releases failed to produce anything but the occasionally memorable track amidst a host of meaningless, self-indulgent twaddle.

King Missile are a frustrating listening experience as they veer from quality entertainment to tiresome dirge and back again. Over repeated keyboard and guitar riffs the vocalist, John S. Hall, reads, and occasionally sings (in a voice so thin and reedy that it makes Jim O'Rourke sound like Lemmy) a selection of his poetry. This should be enough to chill anyone's blood but when they get a good idea and see it through to it's conclusion the results instantly make you a convert. 'Mystical Shit' is a spoof Krishna-psychedelic dirge that should have made Kula Shaker unnecessary while 'Rock N Roll Will Never Die' is a poodle rock workout with Hall shouting over the top. 'Rock N Roll will never die! It's going nowhere man! Look at Def Leppard, drummer's only got one fuckin' arm!' The music itself is unremarkable - sounds any shower of bastards, even Shed 7 for God's sake, could produce but it's Hall's lyrics that make the best tracks stand out. He has a tendency to talk bollocks but is at his best when he assumes a character (the 15 year-old metalhead in 'Rock N Roll..' for example) and takes the idea to its frequently illogical conclusion. On 'Dick' he talks about his friend obsessed with masturbating, 'Wuss' details his experiences as a teenage 'wuss' in high school and, on their finest moment 'Jesus Was Way Cool' he explains the

'coolness' of Jesus from the point of view of a Californian teenager who has realised that the Messiah wasn't just some beard in sandals - he could do all this neat stuff too! Hilarious and poignant at the same time it's carried by a gently piano refrain that trails off beautifully into the fade. Then they follow it up with crap like 'The Fish Who Played The Ponies'. Aaaarrgh!

Ultimately the band have got as far as they deserved to get. They lack ambition and a sense of purpose, the majority of their music is unremarkable but for the few genuine classics they've made over the years they will always have a space in my CD rack.

For many many others they'll be nothing more than something to put on between Hootie & The Blowfish and Alanis Morissette.

RIK RAWLING

Phlegm Poppin' & Milkin AUSTRALIA, JERKER PRODUCTIONS SKUN 2 (1998)

Very restless, rushed, skittering-about record made in 'Boredoms' mode - which in this instance means lots of wild careening guitars, heavy thumping beats, cut-ups, fragments of other records, and a generally irritating coarseness; with the advantage that it's at least decently played and can in fact yield up genuine moments of surprise. Which is often quite difficult to do, with audiences who think they've heard everything. And it's fun - although I can see how it might get up the noses of some listeners who don't share the

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same sense of humour. Actually this record is never quite as tasteless as the band's name, or the provoking sleeve art, might suggest to the casual passer-by, not even when they raise two fingers to World Music and attempt a couple of ethnic music take-offs which come pretty close to 'rocking the standards of acceptability'. One of these I think is a sneer at Aboriginal chanting music, far from politically correct, I must say; the other's a copycat version of early 1980s African guitar music, which suddenly descends into a maelstrom of insane electrified alien-speech and Xenakis-styled gabblings that, for sheer grotesquery value, are simply priceless.

There's yet more ethnological hints to be found in a silly title like 'Polynesian Fertility Dairy Chant' which connects to the large-breasted goddess fetishes pictured in the inner sleeve (and to the front cover of course, which comes I think from a specialist porno mag for pervies who get their jollies slaving over action photos of lactating nude women). It's the fifth track, however, that wins the 'Golden Pineapple' award for a intoxicating brew worthy of the Butthole Surfers at their height - 'tis a beautifully confusing melange of groans, chants, instrumental bleats and bangings, vomited out in time to a chuntering rhythm that clops along like a cart dragged by a three-legged pony. You won't know whether to sink or swim.

Active since 1993 at least, Phlegm's core members are Oren Ambarchi and Rob Avenaim - and, proud of their weird ways, these young men claim to have been shaking up the Sydney and Melbourne scenes with their extreme, very theatrical absurdist live shows, which were 'some of the most bizarre witnessed for many years...it took quite a while for many people to adjust to the Phlegm way of life'. A bold boast, but the check list of names with whom they've played live since then should help you locate their milieu - The No Neck Blues Band, Thurston Moore, Jad Fair, John Zorn, and no end of big name Japanese noiseiks. This is their third CD, although they also seem to be connected with Sportsbra (who appeared on a Dual Plover CD, see last ish) and Menstruation Sisters, whose sole CD is a ghastly joke...anyway at least I liked this one.

ED PINSENT



Maximum Coherence During Flying

USA, IN-PHASE RECORDS BEM01 CD (1999)

Self-titled, self-produced, self-released - that they have no record company deal of their own might just be a barometer of the state of modern music. Not saying these jokers deserve a deal, but they probably would have got one on Virgin Records in the early 1970s. Unfortunately for them it's now nearly year 2000. A little of this is decent enough music, but it sounds very like English progressive rock (in particular Slapp Happy, or Family Fodder) mixed with a pseudo-underground mentality intended to make you think it's more dangerous or interesting than it actually is. Pretentious lyrics or crafted poetry; overly-clever chord changes or musical aptitude. You decide...they seem keen to break in this country, so if you ever buy this why not pass it on to one of Festival-going clan who want a little Texan wackiness in their listening diet.

ED PINSENT



The Serpents You Have Just Been Poisoned

OCHRE RECORDS OCHO10LCD (1999)

Well this lot have shot themselves in the foot straight away by means of a press release (which I seem to have lost) that boasts of how many people are involved, and how famous some of them are. There's matey boy from Super Furry Animals, some Echo and The Bunnymen bloke, and a woman who has connections to Chris Evans' televisual abomination *Thank F*** It's Friday Because The Simpsons Are On the Other Side*. None of which impresses me deeply, though I suppose the cover's quite nice in a 'weren't the 1960s great' sort of way. The music arises from prolonged jams between various combinations of the 34 named participants, and I suspect at least one of their number has a Faust album.

As fundamentally a child of punk rock raised on The Cockney Rejects and The Angelic Upstarts, it is not uncommon that I experience a violent allergic reaction and an overwhelming need to reimmerse myself in Sham 69's *That's Life* album,

particularly when things get a little bit more 60s than is strictly necessary. So despite my numerous reservations, the actual music, which is after all what all this is about, is quite palatable, and certainly not as self-consciously psychedelic as I feared it might be. What saves it from the horror that it could've been in my darkest imaginings, is a strong and healthy spirit of experimentation with all manner of non-rock instruments used in the creation of the songs. Balalaika, bodhran, harmonium, stylophone, harp and wine glasses are all used at different intervals, as is, er...rainstick, and even more puzzlingly 'acoustic theremin', an alleged instrument which must surely prompt the question 'you're avin' a bubble-barf aitcha?' Still, they seem to know what they're doing. Some of it sounds a bit like La Diisseldorf, or Faust, or one of those 1960s keyboards-and-drugs groups that I can't bear to think about. Not exactly my cup of mushroom tea, but good of its kind. If you're reading this with increasing irritation at what an uptight tuned-out cuboid yer reviewer must be, wondering what right someone with a Sham 69 album has to even draw breath, let alone review what sounds like a cool and vibey elpee, then I urge you to rush out and buy this. Not up my street, but I'll wager some folk are going to be playing it to death.

WAR ARROW



Various Artists Extreme Music From Africa

SUSAN LAWLY SLCD016 (1997)

Africa. It was once the 'dark continent' but now thanks to the sanitising filter of popular media it is the playground of Lonely Planet backpackers and rich idiots on balloon safaris. The other Africa, the one where millions starve or die in ancient tribal conflicts, is confined to Live Aid nostalgia and Amnesty International posters.

But while Ladysmith Black Mambazo tour Britain to the delight of Guardian readers there is something stirring back home and this compilation is a staggering insight into the hidden culture of that continent.

William Bennet (of Whitehouse infamy) has exhaustively researched the musical underground of Africa to compile this collection so as you might expect there's little in the way of

tunes you can whistle in the shower. Instead you get everything from minimalist Merzbow to birdsongs and Daktari theme tunes filtered through pirate radio static; Zulu war cries are given multiple overdubs so the voices of dead warriors echo down the centuries as elephant charge drum beats warn the white man that retribution WILL come and while the spears will be sonic this time the results will be no less bloody. Flies buzz over the carcasses of dead water buffalo, British Empire brass band pomp is warped into oblivion by tape manipulation while trains loaded with guns and hate thunder across the Namib desert.

Unlike the related title - *Extreme Music From Japan* - there is little of the full-on noise that you get from the likes of Merzbow, Hijokaidan and co. Instead the tracks here are, for the majority, quite restrained but no less effective as they replace extremes of volume with an ability to convey the vastness of the land and the potential therein.

Electronic drones and feedback, discordant drumbeats and samples are intelligently used to suggest potent images of the place that's out of the frame of the usual reportage and its distinctly non-Western, non-White European approach to structure delivers a sustained sense of uneasy awe for the artists at work.

Superb packaging is down to Alan Gifford's design and the Trevor Brown artwork that features black bondage baby dolls and a tribeswoman in a Gollywog mask about to utilise a banana as a dildo. It's a deliberately 'offensive' image that, coupled with track titles like *Opaque Misery*, *A State of Blood*, *Massacre Rite* and *Somalia!*, goes some way towards illustrating what Conrad meant in *Heart of Darkness* by 'The Horror! The Horror!'

One thing is sure - next time the BBC sends one of its pet celebrities to Mozambique to save an elephant they WON'T be using this album for the soundtrack. It's good to know that there are still some things the all devouring mainstream cannot stomach and this CD is one of them. It's only for those with a taste for the EXOTIC.

RIK RAWLING

PO Box 914, Edinburgh EH17 8BF



Antonius Rex

Zora - An

Observation By

ITALY, MELLOW

RECORDS MMP231 (1994)

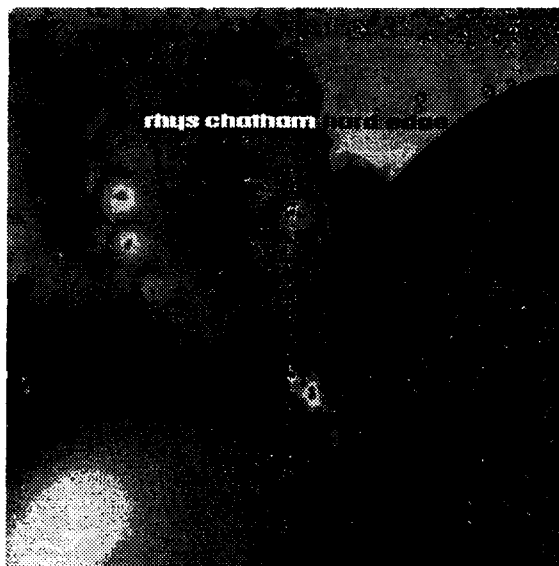
Imagine if you can a Hammer House soundtrack performed by 'supergroup' made up of Jethro Tull, Jean Michel Jarre, Queen and Patti Smith on vocals with Lon Chaney as the Phantom of the Opera knocking tens balls of shit out of a church organ. That's what Antonius Rex sound like as they perform *Zora*, a 30 minute rock 'opera' in 5 parts.

I picked this album up second hand, attracted by the cover illustration of a semi naked blonde vampiress whipping a zombie orchestra into action and by the general 'What the Fuck' weirdness of an Italian rock album. I fully expected it to be shite of the lowest level but...despite some Eurovision pidgin English singing and 'Magic Fly' style keyboard workouts early on it is actually quite impressive. *Zora* is, I think (not being able to decipher the sleeve notes but based on what little I know) inspired by the original 'dirty comix' of the 1970's of which 'Zora', along with 'Cimiteria' and 'Sukia' was notorious in it's no-holds-barred depictions of horror and mayhem. The tone of the comic sets the tone of the music - spooky flutes, phantom keyboards and King Crimson riffs - but also, and totally unexpectedly, boogie piano and flamenco guitar! The Antonius Rex boys hold it all together with impressive musicianship and a bold sense of possibility that hauls the listener along to the inevitable conclusion - a rocking Black Mass! The band develop and control the mood that is very much of it's period and loaded with the influences of the day and I'm sure that many who would sneer at the thought of this being a worthwhile listening experience would fall over themselves to get the Beck or Beastie Boys single that samples this album to death.

Which probably says more about listener attitudes than it does about Antonius Rex's ability to entertain. A 90s approach to similar influences would be a tiresome death metal cacophony that lacks the heart and sense of ambition that Antonius Rex bring to their music. I know which I'd rather have.

RIK RAWLING

Mellow Records, via F.Ili
Asquasciati, 68-18038 Sanremo,
Italy



Peter Hammill

Typical

FIE 9119 (1999)

Peter Hammill has regularly complemented his prodigious studio output with a series of finely recorded live albums. His existence as a performer is in a constant state of flux; although generally working with a regular pool of trusted musicians, he frequently changes the configuration of his band in order to avoid slipping into familiarity and routine.

When speaking about his live work, Hammill emphasises the uniqueness of each performance. Whereas the Prog rock bands, with whom Hammill's former unit, Van der Graaf Generator, were usually and inaccurately bracketed, were concerned with putting on the same show every night, VdGG's concerts contained major elements of randomness and fragmentation. The results, as might be expected, ranged from the inspired to the chaotic.

Hammill has carried and extended this aesthetic of uniqueness into his work of the 1980s and 1990s, and it is this that makes his live performances such fiercely attractive propositions. This immaculately recorded 2CD set fills an obvious gap in the discography, being the first official record of Hammill's most angular and discordant take on the live - alone with keyboard or guitar. In such a setting, these songs - most of which were originally recorded with full band treatments - take on the haunted, skeletal form of Giacometti sculptures. Hammill's sonorous voice swoops manically above his tense, knotted playing, which occasionally lurches to a halt and modulates into

something much more soothing and pastoral.

Hammill's piano playing is often accused of being clumsy. Certainly there is nothing very considered to it, and the number of wrong notes is extraordinary given the frequency with which the songs have been played. But the lack of finesse is a function of the performances themselves. These songs are the vehicles of their own impulses, and both Hammill's voice and his playing are apt to strain and crack as the emotions that he is struggling to express hit him faster than he is able to articulate them.

Few performers can approach the eloquence of Hammill's lyrics, or the ferocious beauty of his full-throated vocal attack. This valuable release, complete with lengthy sleeve notes by the man himself, merits your full attention.

RICHARD REES JONES

Rhys Chatham

Hard Edge

THE WIRE EDITIONS WIRE
9002-2 (1999)

I personally found this record to be largely indigestible, but there's bound to be a lot of takers for it out there. After all it's a thrilling blend of many contemporary musical developments and sound-stylings, no? Hard to even consider criticising Chatham, who's a man with an impeccable pedigree and some 30 years of musical experience behind him; and what's more he clearly enjoyed making this record immensely. He recently 'came out of the closet' as a trumpet player, rather than settling for his role as Mr noisy guitarist, and a guitar-orchestra composer who'd been seen unfairly as some sort of poor man's Glenn Branca;

since when, Chatham's been having a blast tootling his notes and is not afraid to let the Electric-period Miles Davis labels stick to him like flypaper in a high wind. It's his use of the mute that prompts me to put forward this proposal, also on this record the electric piano sound, the occasional super-fast diddley-diddley-dah soloing from his fellow performers, and the generally very 'jazzy' feel. Chatham's other contemporary concession is to use breakbeats, drum'n' bass backdrops, and other hip-hop devices which might just snag the ears of a younger listener. As I don't know the field very well I can't tell how hip or up to the minute are Chatham's exploits in this area, although in places it did remind me a bit of Bill Laswell's rather puny drum'n'bass records on the Sub Rosa label. A project co-ordinated in London by Trevor Manwaring, who brought in the guitarist Gary Smith and his band (who've also recorded as Mass on the Paratactile label). The joker in the pack of the band has gotta be Pat Thomas, whose live electronics, humour and plain insanity do a lot to liven up the sessions and take everyone away from too much self-congratulation.

ED PINSENT

Godspeed You Black Emperor!

f # a # ~

KRANK

Slow Riot For New Zero Kanada

KRANK034 (1999)

'The car's on fire and there's no driver at the wheel and the sewers are all muddled with a thousand lonely suicides'. A fags and whiskey wrecked, Lee Marvin-style drawl continues the story over a backdrop of doomed chords played on violin and cello.

At this point I began to suspect that this could be the best record ever made.

The band name, album title and wilfully enigmatic packaging are all carefully planned to give the correct air of bleak, Bukowski-esque doomed romanticism but this venture is anything but contrived. Descriptions by an impressed but befuddled music press have likened GYBE! to 'Mogwai meets Morricone' which barely does them justice. A nine piece band of men and women playing anything from guitars to glockenspiels and even bagpipes

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they have issued intermittent 'manifestos' stating their intentions to hopefully communicate with those of us out here who suspect that the world will end with a whimper. Not that this music is in any way 'slight'. It is the very definition of 'epic' and at full tilt GYBE! would have even Wagner shitting bricks. They specialise in the repeated chord progression but with the orchestral interludes and found sounds and tapes of street ranters tossed into the mix the music becomes a unique experience. Played loud it is truly awesome, stirring emotions that threaten to engulf and crush the listener like the gravity of Jupiter. Such is the power of their debut album (f # a # ~) I doubted they could ever follow it up but on *Slow Riot...* they completely surpass it.

Superbly packaged with Arabic graphics and biblical references here are 2 tracks that simply soar at a stratospheric level above everything you've ever heard before. 'Moya' is a focused instrumental piece that builds like a wave - drums, strings and guitars slowly rise up from the ocean floor only to be borne headlong to crash on the shore of your senses. Fuck The Dome, fuck getting pissed in a pedestrian town centre, fuck the fireworks - this is what we should play out the Millennium with - stood at the cliff edge, a wall of Marshall amps behind us, blasting GYBE! out into the past and future void. And that should be enough.

But then they give us 'BBF3' - Blaise Bailey Finnegan the 3rd - a poet and ranter recorded on the streets of Providence, Rhode Island who sums up the very real social and political concerns at the heart of GYBE! as he spits his jaded, paranoid venom at the ancient and tedious forces of order that crush our souls every day and leave us stranded that little bit further away from the truth. Behind his rants and rhymes the music rises and falls, piano leading the procession towards the inevitable but liberating crescendo. As haunted strings fade in and out at the epilogue you're left suspecting that nothing can ever be the same after this. All the fears of the past and the hopes of the future are held in a blurred photo of a radio mast. The signal is out there, sometimes faint and drowned out by the perpetual static of entertainment, but it is there. You simply choose to hear it or you don't.

Kranky Records PO Box 578743
Chicago, Illinois 60657 USA

RIK RAWLING

Your Icon *Solitary Man - Bring Me The Head Of A God!*

**BACK TO THE WOMB
RECORDS NO NUMBER
CD (1998)**

Something of an oddity here - this music pretty much defies categorisation and description, although that's not to mean we should bestow automatic 'work of genius' status upon it. I certainly haven't heard a sound quite like this before - it's kind of a twisted modernist take on Acid Folk and 1970s Progressive Rock, spliced with an interest in electronics, yet played with the simplicity and insistence on precision that results from its creators resisting improvisation of any sort. Also these are some of the most engagingly bizarre arrangements and eccentric choice of instruments - you get organ, strings, a violin, a trumpet, a trombone, a piano - even a theremin. The band sound like an

with electronic interpolations to boot, most of the tracks seem to have this death-wish impetus driving them along, like we're all marching to our graves and here's this processional marching band to get us there all the quicker. In fact the last track indicates that when we get to the grave, there's a party going on - so maybe we shouldn't feel too bad.

Clutching for something to compare it too now - perhaps the third Art Bears LP, *The World As It Is Today?* This record is played and scored with tremendous conviction by its two principal creators Steven Harry Mason and Steven Thomas Hooper, joined by a band of merry players. I'm not sure, at time of writing, if I can really recommend it, or to whom, but if you happen across it in your travels I think you might be rather pleasantly surprised.

ED PINSENT

Distributed by CARGO

YOUR ICON



**Solitary Man
- Bring Me The Head Of A God!**

18th century parish church orchestra gone slightly mad, blowing their chops in the pews of some ancient decrepit rural church. Which is a good thing!

I personally could have lived without the singer's vocals myself, but I can see that it's integral to the plot and narrative of this CD / LP. The themes he's singing about are gloomy, although for the most part his poetry is impenetrable - a commentary on the modern world? The power of Pagan mythology? Strange psycho-dramas involving truck drivers? I'm lost. It's bizarre - and charmingly so. Although a track like 'Dance a Crooked Mile' is like a traditional Irish fiddle jig,

The Boxhead Ensemble *Dutch Harbour: Where The Sea Breaks Its Back*

ALP85CD (1997)

The Last Place to go **ALP96CD (1998)**

About halfway along the chain of Aleutian Islands, between the Bering Sea and Pacific Ocean, lies the industrial fishing port of Dutch Harbour. In a world where even the furthest flung and most inhospitable of places are now converged upon locust-like

by swarms of Lonely Planet backpackers this really is *The Last Place To Go*. It became the inspiration for a documentary film by Braden King and Laura Moya from which this soundtrack, directed by Michael Krassner, is taken and it is one of the most evocative pieces of music I've ever heard - so potent are its image stirring properties that it renders the need for accompanying visuals redundant.

The Boxhead Ensemble themselves are a loose collective, amongst them David Grubbs and Jim O'Rourke, playing a largely improvised set that attempts to convey the haunted and removed landscape at Dutch Harbour. The packaging - grey, washed out photos of icebergs and snow-swept roads - and titles like 'Unalaska Island', 'At Sea' and 'For The Glory of Wind and Water' serve to establish the mood but it is the music - often sparse and indistinct - that so brilliantly places the listener. Somewhere between the guitars and the muffled brass emerges something unique - part-reportage and part melancholic longing - that exists in all of us, for somewhere that hasn't been corrupted by strip malls, hanging baskets and the foetid touch of Ronald McDonald.

Admittedly the larger 'band' pieces, for the most part improvised, tend to blur into one another, like dreams at the edge of wakefulness, but the collection has been intelligently and tastefully compiled so the fog is often cleared by bursts of radio static and the ghostly voices of fishermen and old women. Each individual track sheds further light, albeit faint and milky, on the landscape and those who call it home. There are two standout moments - Jim O'Rourke's inspired and spirited guitar playing on 'Captain Bay's Road' and, finest of all, 'Telegraph Hill' where Michael Krassner plays a minimalist chord progression on the piano against a recording of the wind howling in to the shore. Beautiful and almost not there, perhaps like Dutch Harbour itself?

The Last Place To Go is a recording of virtually the same band - minus Grubbs and O'Rourke, replaced by Will Oldham and Jim White - that toured 5 countries and 16 cities throughout Europe where the film was played with an accompanying live score.

It was a bold move to even attempt this and in places it almost works but the overly improvised set eventually falls in on itself and becomes too



cacophonous to adequately portray the mystery and distance in the film. As with Dutch Harbour, voice samples have been used to widen the scope - and hearing the words of a woman who moved around America looking for somewhere to suit her soul, only to find it in Dutch Harbour and a young guy who points out that everyone has been everywhere else - 'this is the last place to go' - is like hearing the truth after a life full of lies. This album stands on its own as an interesting experiment but it will always be in the shadow of the original work - a restrained accomplishment in these days of ephemeral nonsense where no-one has the guts to commit to their vision. It is the exact polar opposite of the latest Ibiza Beach Party compilation and I know where I would rather be.

RIK RAWLING

Henry Cow

Unrest

RER RECOMMENDED HC2 (1999)

Dumitrescu, Avram, Cutler, Hodgkinson with The Hyperion Ensemble

Musique Action

RER RECOMMENDED DACH1 (1999)

Lagos, Venosta and Mariani

Metamorphoses: Electronic

Adventures in

Flamenco

RER RECOMMENDED LVM1 (1999)

And from the ReR catalogue this season...the *Musique Action* CD is four long tracks of pretty intense modern composer music, showcasing Romanians Dumitrescu and Avram, along with our English heroes Cutler and Hodgkinson. The Dumitrescu track appeals to me very highly. Called 'New Meteors and Pulsars', it was composed in 1988 after Dumitrescu witnessed a meteor or asteroid colliding with the earth. To read his vivid description of the event you'd think he was standing right next to the point of impact, surviving unscathed by some miracle - but then someone as blessed as Dumitrescu must have an entire division of Guardian Angels to watch over his enlightened soul. He took the falling star as a personal warning from the Heavens - it seems to have changed his life thereafter. Feeding the event into his highly personal compositional process hath wrought a mighty computer-assisted composition. It is a terrifying listen, and not simply because of the loud and sudden explosive, atonal crashings that it whumps out at you, scaring the living daylights out of you and your pet cat. No, the terror he evokes is deep and metaphysical, saying something profound about mankind and his place in the universe and somehow tapping into currents of primal energy that have existed for thousands of years before civilisation. This is similar I think to his equally awe-inspiring 1991 composition

'Pierres Sacrees', available on Edition Modern ED MN 1003. Also here: 'Nouvelle' Axe', composed by Ana Maria Avram in 1998 and played by the Hyperion Ensemble - where she claims 'all the action is in the details and tiny nuances'. The basis of the piece is the 'sound-noise relation and the relation of symmetry around a central axis'. Chris Cutler's 'Life on Earth' is a percussion piece where he's joined by Avram, Hodgkinson and the Hyperion Ensemble; and Hodgkinson himself turns in a reworking of 'Black Death and Errors in Construction', quite unlike the version which appeared on his last CD. He says 'I'm very happy with the idea of a composition having distinctly different realisations'.

The reissue of the second Henry Cow CD is extremely

welcome. Originally issued in 1974 at a time when the band had a reasonably successful career, touring and supporting major bands like Captain Beefheart and The Magic Band. Due to their busy work schedule, they had fewer songs prepared than they'd had for the first LP, which accounts for why there's a fair bit of improvisation and last-minute studio invention taking place in the grooves of *Unrest*. Actually this is what makes the LP so enjoyable - not quite as constipated as the first LP, which at times is almost airless in its attention to detail. *Unrest* uses more studio technique - particularly multiple overdubbing, which sounds excellent in this remastered form. All those Lindsay Cooper wind instrument overdubs make

this LP their *Uncle Meat*, without a doubt.

Henry Cow are turning out to have been more of an important band than you might have first thought. After all, how many bands were melding elements of avant classical, prog-rock, jazz, free improvisation and tapework all on one record - in 1974? Also, I reckon, the Cow were an important step in the Chris Cutler project - selling you forms of music that are complex, intellectual and arguably 'good' for you - but sweetening the deal by doing it in the context of a popular-ish rock band which Virgin-megastore shoppers (then) could have dug.

Cutler continues to this day to make available, through ReR, all forms of music which he personally believes in. Unfortunately in this batch of releases the Flamenco CD is 50 minutes of infuriatingly smug drivel. Electro-acoustic treatments, by Giovanni Venosta and Massimo Mariani, of traditional Flamenco guitar music, played by guitarist Alfredo Lagos. It comes down to little more than a few cheap electronic effects - phasing and echo, which are so familiar as to be beyond cliché. In fact, you could produce the same effects yourself with just a Gypsy Kings CD and two guitar pedals - assuming that you would ever want to. These manipulations are unadventurous, tepid, dull and unimaginative, and kill any fire in the music stone dead; so though the title may promise 'Adventures', quite honestly I've had more exciting adventures buying a loaf of white bread at Tesco's.

ED PINSENT



The Sound Projector Sixth issue 1999

Beck

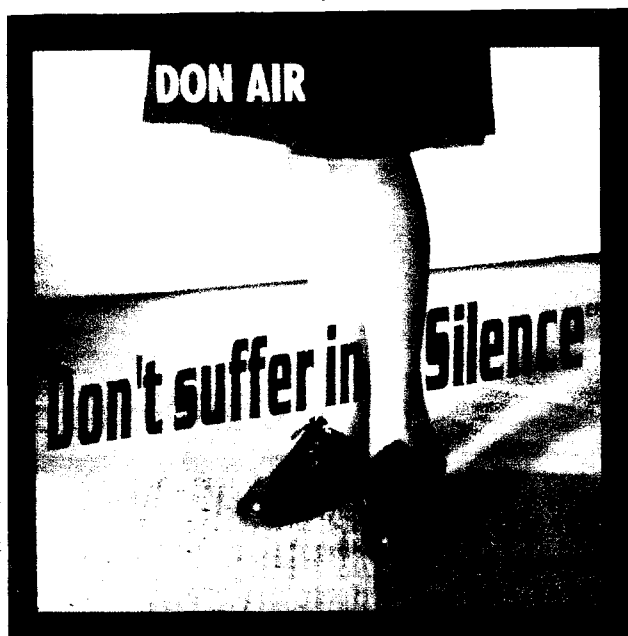
Mutations

GEFFEN GED 25184 (1998)

I have problems with the concept of 'songwriter'. Although the term can be taken literally to mean someone who writes songs, it has an unspoken implication of the fag-smoking loner crying into his acoustic guitar over that darned woman, or whatever. Bob Dylan and Lou Reed, neither of whom I particularly 'dig', are both regarded as songwriters in the classic - not to mention nobby - sense. Negative criticism of Lou Reed's finely-honed tales of life in New York is not criticism, so the subtext runs - it is ignorance. Okay, so Mr Zimmerman may have made one or two good points in a fairly vivid and memorable way, but so what? Have any of you actually *listened* to the first Adam & The Ants album? You can't tell me that *Dirk Wears White Sox* isn't a finely crafted work of art, but (insert name of your favourite Dylan album here) is. Yet who hails Mr Ant as a poet with the soul of a revolutionary, or whatever? No-one, because the unspoken definition of 'songwriter', as readers of crap like *Mojo* ('Rejoice! Rod Stewart's back catalogue is due for critical reassessment!') understand it, is purely subjective, and thus meaningless. Now some misguided turds are even calling Noel Gallagher a songwriter, and of course (whiney voice) he has an ear for a good tune. Yes. Particularly if it's on a Beatles album, and besides, Hitler's paintings weren't *that* bad.

So at the risk of appearing to be a bit of a cock, Beck is definitely one of the few people I'd call a songwriter in the same way people other than myself claim John Lennon may have been. I'm a latecomer to his work, having been introduced to it by Beavis and Butthead, who sniggered relentlessly throughout the minute's worth of 'Loser' that turned up on their beloved television. Two years later I ran out and secured immediate purchase of the albums *Mellow Gold* and *Odelay*, both of which superbly demonstrate Beck's uncanny knack of welding wrist-slashing country folk onto frazzled hip-hop. What an inventive vision! What incredible lyrics! Beck assembles words in the most absurdly Dadaist combinations and sings them like Joy Division were some sort of light-hearted comedy turn. And who else has even attempted to combine scratching and slide guitar? The crowning achievement is how this weird cross-eyed hybrid sounds like the most natural and obvious thing in the world.

I had heard that *Mutations* was to be a traditional 'song' based album, showcasing his folkier leanings and so leaving the beatbox and tapes of irate rednecks locked securely in the toy cupboard. The unrequested commendation of a record shop person that my purchase was wise, *Mutations* being 'right up there with Neil Young' flustered me somewhat, but I persevered and shelled out hard cash. It paid off well. *Mutations* is as reported, traditionally arranged and more than a little on the folky side. There's a few cranky old synths here, and the odd illustrative random noise, but other than that it's strummin', singin' and real drums all the way. But, and here's the important bit, it's a Beck album complete with that beautifully raw, and almost haunted production he favours. Once it all sinks in, nothing sounds particularly incongruous against his musically wilder moments. 'Cold Brains' and 'Runners Dial Zero' both chill the blood in the same way as *Mellow Gold's* 'Steal My Body Home'. This isn't actually the radical departure from previous work that has been suggested. It may sound different in terms of instrumentation, but the



cumulative effect is just as richly melancholic and powerful as on previous albums. Beck could bust Lou Reed's ass with one hand tied behind his back.

WAR ARROW

Don Air

Don't Suffer in Silence

RESPONSE RECORDS, RESPO11CD (1999)

A quite irresistible little EP from one Donato Airtos, a one-man act who's a bedroom DJ with a massive record collection and - thankfully - a great sense of humour. Only the severest sourpuss could turn it off. These six tracks are snappy, poppy fun, each verging on a pastiche of Don's fave musical genres - dub, Blue Note jazz, Brazilian, EZ-listening and even a touch of Ennio Morricone. Impeccable tastes

for sure, but he's more than some eclectic cooljay ninny - he's done something useful with his influences - each ditty is beautifully packaged, full of warmth and fun, and executed with a clean, bright finish, even if they are just a tad overlong. Still, the cheesy voice strained through a telephone of the singer (The Don himself, one assumes) should have you in stitches throughout.

ED PINSENT

From PO Box 254, London WC1X 0AQ

The Lothars

Meet The Lothars

AUSTRALIA, CAMERA OBSCURA RECORDS CAM018CD

USA, WOBBLY MUSIC TOTTER001 (1998)

Regular pop-music instrumentals played on Theremins. What a gimmick, eh? The trendy buzz surrounding the Theremin just now threatens to drown out the genuine buzz of the music it produces by virtue of valves and radio science. That said this is quite an entertaining record, although doesn't quite deliver on the fun promised by the sleeve art (suggesting a barrelful of monkeys, quite literally).

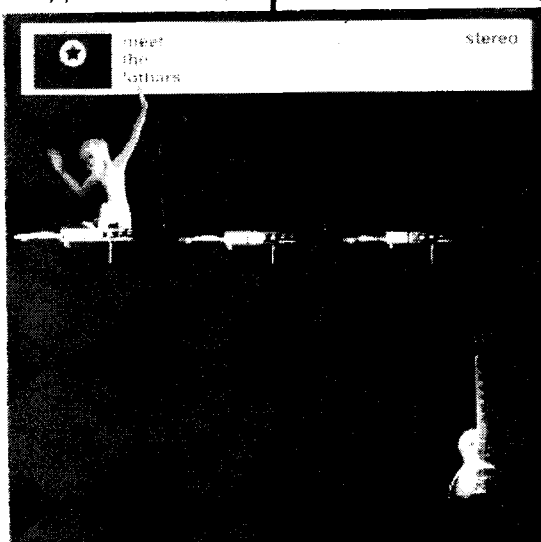
ED PINSENT

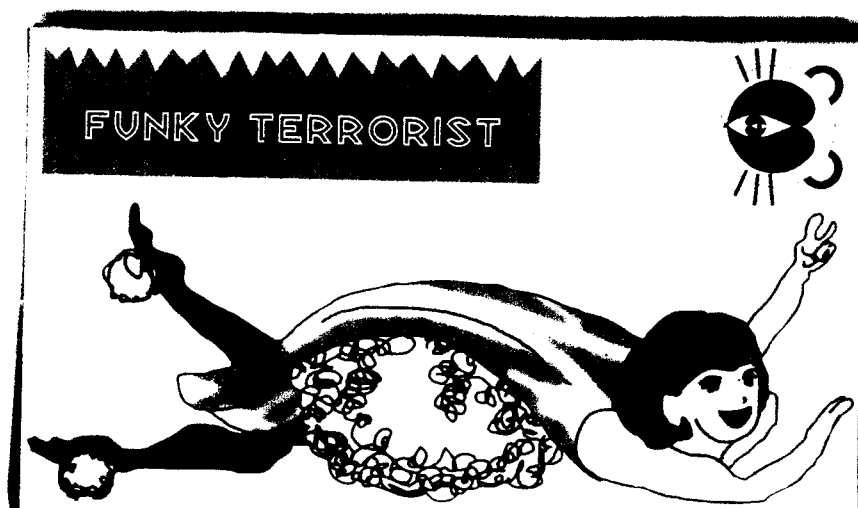
A 1970s issue of *Cracked* magazine featured a memorable take on the predictable format of the rags-to-riches rock movie. The stars of this comic strip were a young group called The Guitars. All four members played the drums. The manager suggested a gimmick was needed in order to further their career, so they tied shoes to their head. I no

longer have the magazine, but the panel depicting the triumphant stage debut of The Guitars - four blokes with shoes tied to their heads sitting behind four drum kits - is one that I'll take to the grave.

On paper, the Lothars' appeal is similar - the potential absurdity of a group of four theremin players, except they've cheated and one is actually a guitarist. And this is in spite of my vague distrust of theremin obsessives, not so much because of the disproportionate reverence held for what is an extraordinarily limited instrument, but more that praise for the theremin usually leads onto Divine, Russ Meyer, *Hello Kitty* and the other icons of modern beatnik culture.

In practice, although unlikely to change many people's lives, The Lothars are still quite listenable. I'm glad that those concerned weren't so purist as to





Funky Terrorist

525

AUSTRALIA, DUAL PLOVER UQF 998 (1999)

This picture should tell you all to need to know about the Funky Terrorist mini-CD. It's FUN, it's POP, it's new, it's out now, and you all need one. Yep, an extremely desirable consumer item, highly limited and only available from Australia. Packaged like a parcel of chewing gum, secured with a velcro tag which unfolds into an Origami liner with Japanese and Western texts and collages printed red on black, so that you feel you're reading a cracked version of a religious pamphlet. The groovy weird sexy electric music is irresistible pop and dub, mixed up with tricks like a vocal taped over a classic Cheesey-listening track, chanting and slogans and sexy scenarios of emancipated men and women engaged in surreal cartoon-like activities. A great solo turn by, I think Adrienne Patrick, one of

exclude the guitar, for it serves to anchor the music to a personal frame of reference allowing one to focus more clearly on the hot theremin action. Without a guitar this could have been a disaster. I gather from the barely approximated melodies and solos that the theremin is a primitive and uncooperative beast. Perhaps it is the instrument's crude simplicity that has prompted the group to work so hard at getting it right. Whether this is the case, or whether they just casually banged out these tracks one Sunday evening after the pub, is difficult to tell, but the end result draws you into its own world after only a couple of plays, overcoming the initial shock of what at first sounds like a bit too much of a novelty item to be granted house room. A weird but somehow loveable album. I bet in the 1970s when Tangerine Dream were doing all those albums with a million giant synthesizers on each track, they never dreamt that the future was going to sound like this!

WAR ARROW

Amber Asylum

Songs of Sex and Death

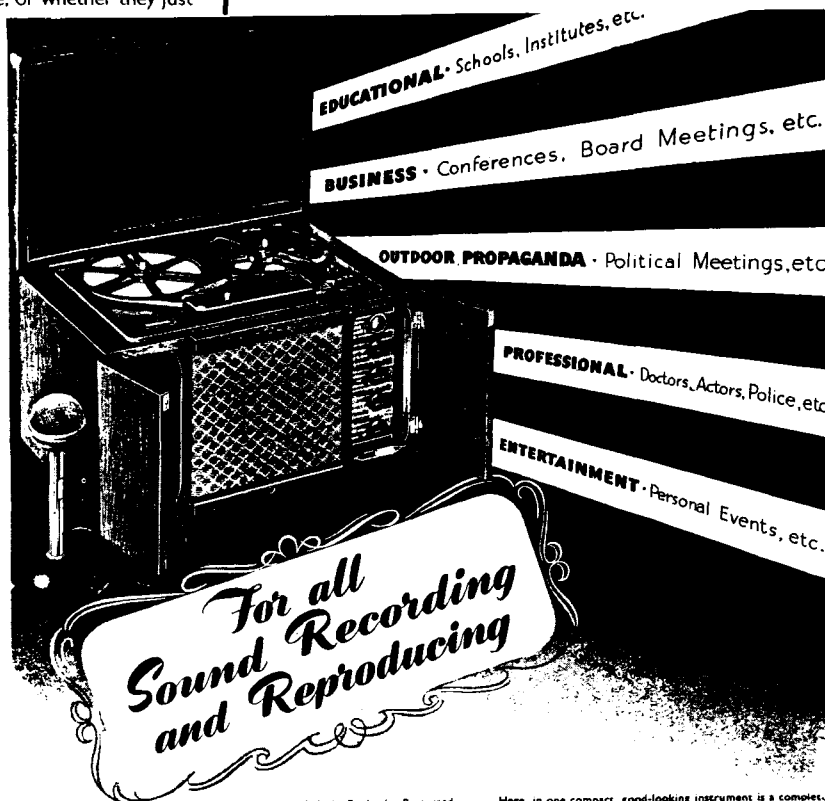
USA, RELEASE RR6416-2 (1999)

Kris Force's new release is much the same as the last one I'd heard - she's in danger of becoming an 'alternative' answer to Kate Bush and Enya, with those pristine high-pitched tones of her voice. It's a glacial record. She covers a Buffy Sainte Marie song called 'Vampire' with ghastly dispassionateness - 'Your genius frightens me...awe-inspiring', she wails, yet her voice conveys not one iota of fear, awe or inspiration. And certainly not genius! The musical arrangements feature very brittle cello sweeps, and chorussed guitar plucks; an atmosphere of damp drawing rooms, cold Sunday mornings and mildewed windows. As for the sex and death, I'd hoped that songs which purport to be about such axiomatic, fundamental and powerful themes might be a bit less limp and ineffectual. Death music in my book should evoke the fear and terror of death; Robert Johnson's recorded work hasn't been improved on in this area. Amber Asylum's sleeve art is likewise wimpish, utilising those bankrupt images of a drowning pale figure and red flowers to bolster the tired old theme. Pshaw.

ED PINSENT

the Australian all-girl band Alternahunk. Order now - Dual Plover address is with the Lucas Abela interview.

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The Sound Projector Sixth issue 1999

**Current 93 / Michael Cashmore /
Christoph Heemann**

Untitled

DURTRO 045 (1999)

Current 93

Calling For Vanished Faces

DURTRO 043 (1999)

Two more additions to the ever-expanding Durtro catalogue. The untitled C93/Cashmore/Heemann CD is a compilation of out-takes and alternate versions from the last two C93 studio albums, previously unreleased demos, and solo pieces from Tibet's regular collaborators. Highlights include a sung vocal take of 'All The Pretty Little Horses' and the sepulchral 'Judas As Black Moth', a long meditative drift from the *Soft Black Stars* sessions that is the equal of anything on that twilight masterpiece. What makes the disc essential, though, are Christoph Heemann's two contributions, wherein silvery drones ripple menacingly around everyday sounds to startling effect.

Calling For Vanished Faces is an exhaustive 2CD compilation tracing C93's development from *Dogs Blood Rising* to *Soft Black Stars*. As such it represents a useful update of the 1993 *Emblems* collection, with only three pieces being duplicated from the earlier set.

The diversity of musical styles on the first disc is startling, from nightmarish looped onslaughts to demented rhythmic freakouts, but they are unified by the tragic quality of Tibet's voice and the hallucinatory imagism of his lyrics. The disc ends memorably, with three songs from 1992's epochal *Thunder Perfect Mind* album and Nick Cave's sublime reading of 'All The Pretty Little Horses' showing how Michael Cashmore's mournful guitar sound has served to focus and intensify Tibet's obsessions.

The second disc, for all its emphasis on the fragility and resignation in C93's recent work, also demonstrates something that is often overlooked, namely that Tibet is the possessor of a great, warped pop/rock sensibility. 'Lucifer Over London' is driven unstoppably by a grinding guitar riff; 'The Dead Side Of The Moon' has Tibet stepping nimbly through a minefield of bass, drums and the full panoply of Stapleton weirdness; while the epic 'The Seven Seals...' attains pure grace and fluency through its endless, achingly sad guitar and glockenspiel figure.

The collection as a whole is further proof, if any were needed, of Tibet's unfailing ability to disconcert and overwhelm the listener through the precise evocation of atmospheres of fear, despair and terror. Newcomers, start here.

RICHARD REES JONES

Swans, *Various Failures*

YOUNG GOD YG06 (1998)

Angels of Light, *New Mother*

YOUNG GOD YG08 (1999)

Body Lovers/Body Haters

YOUNG GOD/FRINGECORE FR001 (1999)

Michael Gira is a myth-maker, acutely aware of the danger of ossification and constantly realigning his position to avoid it. When Swans emerged in the early 1980s, their grindingly repetitious sonic assault (once memorably described as 'the sound of a man walking round in circles with his neck chained') seemed like a strategy for obsessive rearrangement of a basic set of lyrical and musical permutations. The songs didn't end; they stopped.

Gira eventually tired of this game and, coincident with the introduction of female vocalist/keyboardist Jarboe, began to introduce chilling acoustic elements into his songwriting on 1987's essential *Children of God* LP. Over the next several years, Swans would refine and develop this approach in a series of albums that merged immense rhythmic power with an unearthly delicacy of acoustic instrumentation.

These records – 1989's *The Burning World*, 1991's *White Light from the Mouth of Infinity* and 1992's *Love of Life* – have long been deleted and are consequently much sought after. *Various Failures* is a double CD containing a generous selection of material from the period (complete reissues were ruled out, partly on economic grounds but also because Gira was content to let some of the songs disappear).

Listening again to this music, one is struck by how expansive it all sounds, the polar opposite of the early records' savage inward spin. The loudest pieces here, such as 'Will We Survive' and the wonderfully titled 'The Golden Boy that was Swallowed by the Sea', are mesmerising dramas of layered orchestration, the massed guitars and drums perfectly framing Gira's resonant vocals. These songs construct boundaries only to dissolve them: the spaces they occupy are vast and limitless. Elsewhere, Gira and Jarboe offer up unbearable intimacies of form and language, with the shimmering acoustic beauty of the music and the spectral sighs of Jarboe's voice drawing the listener unmercifully into dense narratives of isolation and failure.

Gira has taken this loose, bluesy strain even further in his new song-based project, *Angels of Light*. These songs are less reliant on the apocalyptic visual imagery that underpinned Swans' relentless, thrilling surge. Gira's new voice is one of humble intimacy, the sound of a man shedding past burdens and discovering new ways of seeing. The musical palette is restrained and absorbing, with accordion and dulcimer adding colour and intimacy throughout.

The results are occasionally stunning; 'Forever Yours' and 'Song For My Father' in particular are among the most affecting things Gira has written. But there is a schematic quality to some of the other songs that strikes a jarring note. The lyrics are recited slowly and dolefully, with little melodic invention to lighten the mood. At their recent London concert, *Angels of Light* shrugged off these limitations in the songs and transformed them into blinding, ecstatic convulsions of pure energy. The record, sadly, suffers from a listlessness that the warm and delicate arrangements are unable to dissipate.

If *New Mother* represents a slackening off from Swans' intense emotional charge, Gira's parallel *Body Lovers/Body Haters* project can be seen as a move in the opposite direction, a ratcheting of atmosphere and tension. These two CDs, representing the first phase in a projected three-album series, were originally issued separately in the USA and have now been brought together for European release.

Gira accurately describes this mainly instrumental music as 'psycho-ambient'. While its abstract drifts and swirls share many of the formal properties of Ambient, they are determinedly inward-looking. Also, unlike much Ambient there is a restless intelligence at work here, ordering, shaping and defining. Distant, rumbling drones are picked apart by alien sounds, stately rhythms and sparing acoustic instrumentation. Occasional vocal interventions – a woman's weeping, a baby's screaming and a short, mournful song – all serve to heighten the sense of unease. Seriously effective, but not to be listened to with the lights off.

RICHARD REES JONES

The Moon Lay Hidden Beneath A Cloud

Rest On Your Arms Reversed

WORLD SERPENT ART12CD (1999)

The Moon etc etc is what Albin did before *Der Blutarsch*, as reviewed in the previous issue of *The Sound Projector*. This is a posthumous CD, not in the sense that one listens to it after pigging out on a delicious chick pea tahini and lemon juice based mulch, rather that it collects 17 tracks of previously obscure material. Whilst *Der Blutarsch* is essentially the work of Albin alone, this earlier incarnation was executed in collaboration with the vocal talents of his then girlfriend, whose name is written in script too gothic for my synapses to unscramble. In my perhaps slightly bigoted opinion, the moment when someone gets their main squeeze into the band is usually the beginning of the end. Not so here, for her vocals are perfectly matched to the dark medieval thrust of Albin's music, and I don't use the word 'medieval' lightly. This not only sounds like it was composed before the advent of sampling, it sounds like it predates electricity, and perhaps the spread of Christianity – even on tracks where the use of a sampler is made obvious by virtue of some repeated phrase. Gothic could perhaps be the right word, not like the painted innies with a bat fixation and the worst record collection you've ever seen, but like the cathedrals, or at least some other imposing edifice built in a cold climate from granite, human suffering, and a propensity towards the burning of heretics. As you might expect, it all seems to revolve around death, love, sacrifice, honour, and other extremes of emotion set paradoxically to instantly memorable (if rather sombre) melodies. I could imagine the milkman whistling some of this, although probably not a milkman renowned for his madcap clownlike behaviour back at the depot.

WAR ARROW

▲▲▲▲▲▲▲ Rise to Claim ▲▲▲▲▲▲▲

☐ **S A T U R N** ★

⊙⊙⊙ Ring and Sky ⊙⊙⊙

...by those who see with their eyes closed...



At The Mountains Of Madness with *Sandy Pearlman*

*The interview opposite took place 15 September 1988 at the offices of
CBS / Sony, in Soho Square London UK*



The Sound Projector Sixth issue 1999

Interview with Sandy Pearlman by Edwin Pouncey

EP How did the *Imaginos* concept come about?

SP Along with all the songs that we brought to the table to make the first Blue Öyster Cult record, together with some that we eventually wanted to put on the second, there was a large body of material which went under the working title of 'The Soft Doctrines of Imaginos'. It was going to be a dramatic, narrative and philosophical poem about the occult origins of World War I. Not all the songs that are on this particular record [*Imaginos*] were written then. The idea, however, existed when the band began.

EP How far back are we going here? Cows? Stalk Forrest Group period?

SP No, this stuff is contemporaneous with the founding of Blue Öyster Cult. A lot of the lyrics were ground out in a fevered period of creativity that lasted about five months. That also yielded 'Workshop of the Telescopes', 'Cities on Flame with Rock 'N' Roll' and 'Before the Kiss, a Redcap', just a tremendous number of songs that were written in a rush when we were rehearsing in Patti Smith's New York loft. Around the time that the band got their recording contract with Columbia. 'Les Invisibles' was originally not written for this song cycle, although it comes out of the same mind set, it was written as a set of lyrics for Patti Smith. I wanted to write some lyrics for her because she liked what I did, but she never sang the song. As it turned out it seemed genetically related to the rest of it so 'Les Invisibles' became the last song in the dramatic sequence.

EP I always thought that 'Astronomy' was the song that started it all.

SP No, 'Astronomy' was just the first one to appear [on *Secret Treaties*], but it wasn't the first song. 'Magna of Illusion' was the first one written.

EP On the inner sleeve of the US edition of *Secret Treaties* there is a quote from a book called *Origins of a World War* by Rossignol. Presumably this is another piece in the *Imaginos* jigsaw?

SP Sure. The first part of *Imaginos* was going to pay off with the seeding of Europe. This was to be achieved by using this new germ called the 'Piece of the Perfect Black' which is described in 'Magna of Illusion'. It prepares Europe psychologically for war madness, for World War I. The second part was going to be the aftermath of that. The second part was supposed to have been called 'Germany Minus Zero and Counting', and so that fictitious book by Rossignol about World War I was going to have a role in the second part of *Imaginos*.

EP Was this fictitious book your version of Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*?

SP Yes, exactly. People have been writing to us for years asking where they can find a copy.

EP What fascinates you about HP Lovecraft and his work?

SP I think that Lovecraft is the intermediary between Edgar Allan Poe and Thomas Pynchon. All three wrote novels about inexplicable events that were situated in Antarctica and the ungrounded seat of madness which exists there. Poe wrote 'The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym', Lovecraft wrote 'At The Mountains of Madness' and then Pynchon picked up the theme again in *V*. Poe lived in Providence, Rhode Island for a long time which is where Lovecraft spent most of his life. I'm fascinated with Lovecraft because he probably presents a more manifest and explicit notion of ungrounded madness than any other writer. He doesn't present it in an ideological or schematic manner, he presents it in a language that uses adjectives in a way that nobody has used adjectives before. It's unlikely that anybody will ever use them that well again. Lots of people try to imitate Lovecraft, Colin Wilson being the most successful, but Wilson has imitated him in the realm of ideas, by developing an analysis of what Lovecraft is doing which he has taken several steps further. But he hasn't attempted to master the Lovecraftian adjectival excess, which is probably a thing that was genetic to Lovecraft. For various reasons it can't be mastered. Some people think that he's just junk. Wilson thought Lovecraft was junk at first and then went on to write three and a half novels in the spirit of Lovecraft.

EP Which other writers of supernatural fiction do you admire?

SP I love Arthur Machen, I think he's wonderful. He had a tremendous influence on Lovecraft. Machen is probably the greatest, followed by [Sheridan] Le Fanu who is responsible for creating the lesbian vampire motif in his story 'Carmilla'.

EP Do you try to incorporate any influence these writers have on your own writing into the band?

SP Oh yeah. I've been reading these guys since I was very young. I spent three months out of every year, for ten years, on my uncle's 200 acre property up in Western Massachusetts. That's where the Dunwich country is, and I just used to walk around at night and think what a strange kind of place it was. Little did I know how strange it really was. I don't think I ever caught a glimpse of a Wilbur Whateley, though. Up on the hill top, waiting for his demon brother.

EP Are the band similarly interested in Lovecraftian imagery?

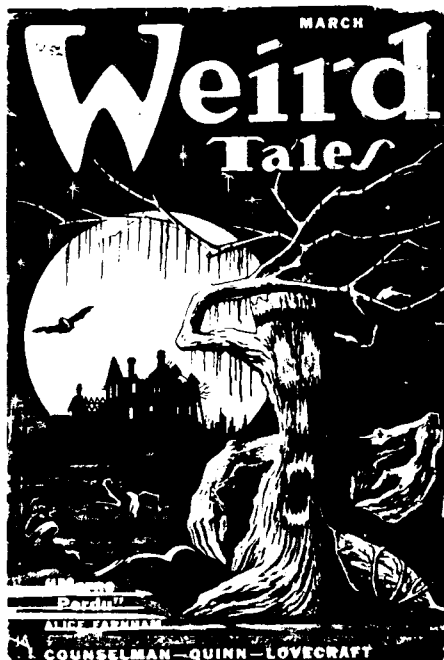
SP Nobody there is really into Lovecraft. I present them with lyrics and, in this case, there was such a genetic connection that some of these things started to write themselves. I think Donald [Roeser], Eric [Bloom] and Albert [Bouchard] were certainly impressed with the circumulative power of these images and that's how *Imaginos* came to be done. For a long time they were extremely reluctant to write more music and complete *Imaginos* as a piece. They felt that through records like *Tyranny And Mutation*, *Secret Treaties*, *On Your Feet Or On Your Knees* and *Agents Of Fortune* they were becoming more like the Children of the Cult, and that conception was beginning to eat them up. They just didn't want to be defined totally as the Children of the Cult, so that's why it took a long time to get *Imaginos* done.

EP If *Imaginos* had been released earlier do you think it could have made or ruined the Cult?

EP I don't know, I just don't know. In the early days not only was the radio better but the market was more open. If *Imaginos* had come out in the late 70s you would have been dealing with the last frills of the Summer of Love. The ten year cycle was winding down but it was still there. The Blue Öyster Cult used to release records at that time which would automatically go to number one on AOR radio, and that can't happen any more. The execution on *Imaginos* is so extreme that it surpasses the edge city feel of the black side of *Tyranny And Mutation* for example. Had *Imaginos* come out ten years earlier, my feeling is that it would probably have done very well.

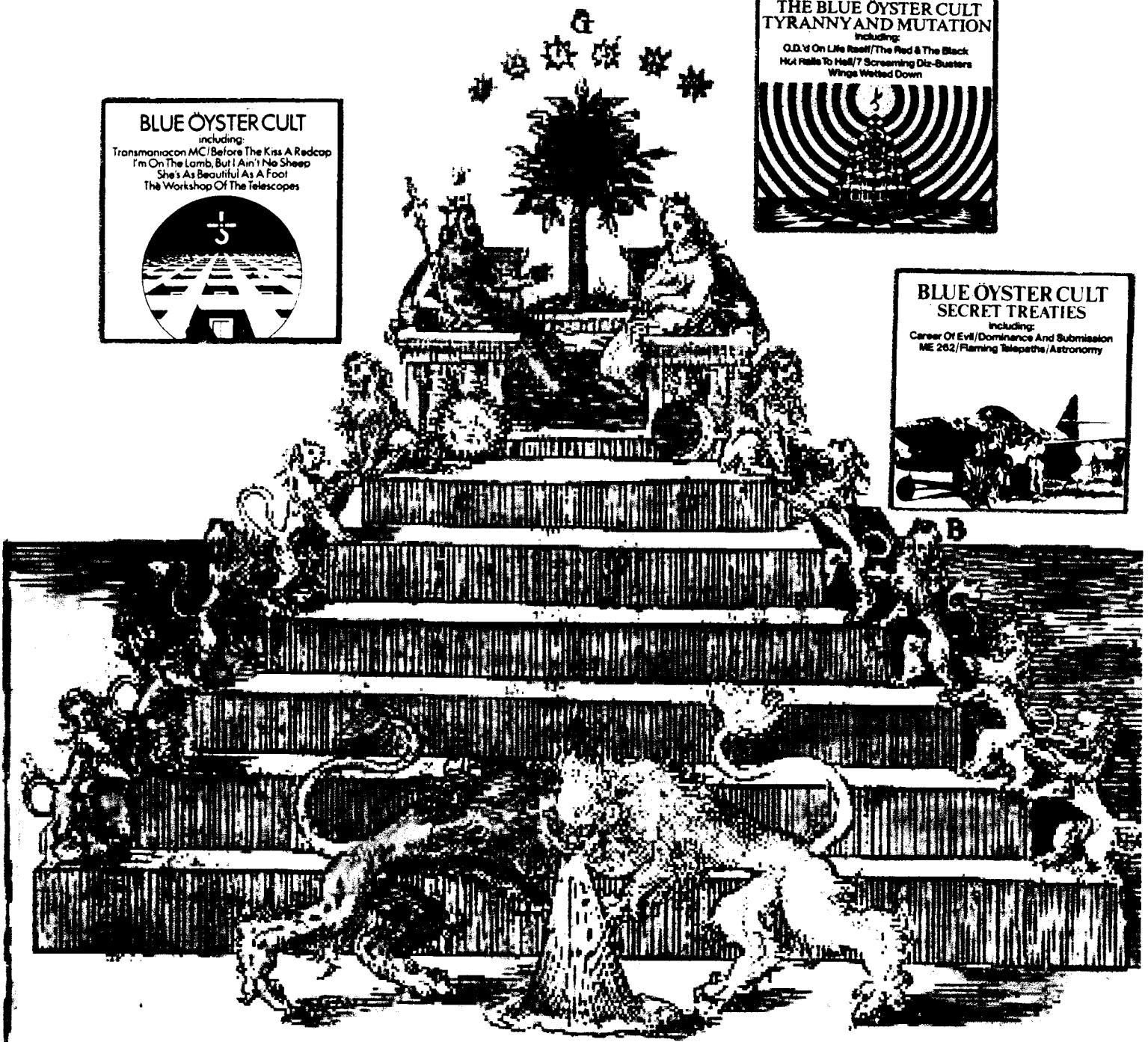
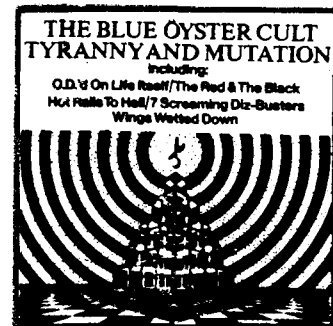
EP Can you explain to me about some of the musical ideas on *Imaginos*? It is very symphonic and psychedelic in places, particularly on a song like 'Frankenstein's Castle At Weissaria' for example.

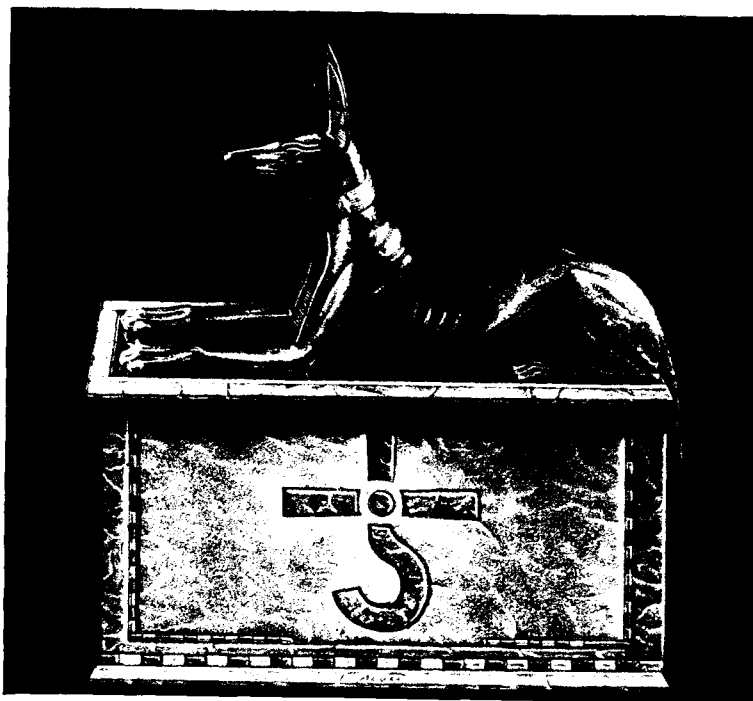
SP Right! We incorporated traditional heavy metal dynamics and then moved on to some sort of weird, altered consciousness version of the Pink Floyd mind set. We then moved beyond that into the realm of Wagner and Parsifal. It was all completely purposeful, to play with all these elements was the idea behind the whole project. Some of the other songs are just dense and relatively one-dimensional i.e., 'I Am The One You Warned Me Of' which is a perfect heavy metal song. It is, I think, the definition of heavy metal. Each of the songs deal with different aspects of personality. I mean for real! There's a tremendous amount of variety and it was purposeful that one side of *Imaginos* was pretty unrelenting, while the other side, even with 'Astronomy', should be more contemplative. We ended the record with 'Imaginos' so there would be this vast sigh of release from all this unrelenting madness.



A SYMPHONY OF HORROR: THE TRUE MEANINGS OF THE BLUE ÖYSTER CULT

By Ed Pinsent, written during The Last Days of May 1999





The Blue Öyster Cult; *Tyranny and Mutation*, *Secret Treaties*, and *Imaginos*. Investigate this particular back catalogue of LPs as soon as you can, for some true undiscovered inexhaustible documents. The music and words in these esoteric LPs are indelible, something you can keep coming back to and never get tired of it. Although we concentrate here on the triumvirate of the first three LPs, there's enough to sustain interest long beyond that point. We all cherish musical moments on our favourite records. Here with the Blue Öyster Cult we have songs constructed with the same ingenuity that went into the pyramids; with many hidden secrets to satisfy any student of the occult. We have guitar solos, not meaningless ego-tripping throwaway blues-based timewasting nonsense, but sustained and composed lines of pure genius, weaving their way across brilliant minor-key melodies, and colliding sparing use of feedback and noise with sweet melodic harmonies. Baroque and high-flown it may be, yet everything is played and executed with such a lightness of touch that makes every song soar high with the angels. And yet, so many people appear to have filed this band away under just another Heavy Metal combo who flirted with satanic imagery. Whatever can be wrong with people?

The story starts with three LPs recorded in the 1970s - *Blue Öyster Cult*, *Tyranny and Mutation*, and *Secret Treaties*. The narrative is only brought to a satisfactory close much later by *Imaginos*, released in 1988. In between came a lot of great LPs, a chart hit 'Don't Fear The Reaper', lots of live shows, live LPs, some less good studio LPs...and a career for the band. The *Agents of Fortune* LP was a stab at commercial success, and for the most part it worked. This narrative is the vision of writer and poet Sandy Pearlman, who masterminded the scheme from behind the scenes as record producer, lyricist and svengali. A prehistory of the band includes previous incarnations as The Cows, Soft White Underbelly and The Stalk-Forrest Group, whose divine *St Cecilia* LP remains unreleased unofficially.

Total originality is the Cult's hallmark, I would say - these themes never once descend into cliché. Even to describe them as a 'satanic' band is hopelessly wide of the mark, and to try and root out hidden references is only to have them vanish before your eyes. Like conjurors, they use mirrors (an image that recurs throughout their oeuvre, in lyrics, song and LP titles, and sleeve art). The secrets are ingeniously concealed, as though each song were constructed by an alchemist, an esoteric warlock working with his black books, encoding every key in such wise that only the true initiates, and not the merely curious, may proceed.

If inclined to doubt this, just listen to the way the records are made. Everything moves just too fast for you to keep up, it's all slightly ahead of you; fleeting hints both in lyric and tunes vanish before you as you try to clutch them.



LYRICS

'Think I'll write Good Health to You'

To decipher their lyrics is deliberately contrived to be difficult, through actual vocal delivery and crowded production techniques; to obtain the full texts was a matter, in the 1970s and 1980s at any rate, of sending an aae to an apartment address in New York printed on the sleeve. This was in stark opposition to the prevailing practice in this period. Other bands would print every line of their baby-baby nonsense on the wasteful gatefold sleeves in 9 pt type. Not so The Cult, who made the dedicated fan send away. This in fact elicited a tremendous response from fans, 'There's a positive benefit to having them write in', said Pearlman in 1976. 'Not only do we get to keep their stamps, and have CBS send the letters back, so we make some income that way, but we also get to know exactly what they're thinking.'

When the lyrics arrived, the reader was faced with an old fashioned IBM computer printout on punched continuous paper sheets, as though the lyrics had been conceived by some futuristic master-brain machine, and the band were little more than its puppets...is the Gawlik sleeve of *Tyranny and Mutation* another clue? The mind-control waves issuing from a monstrous radio beacon. 'We get to know exactly what they're thinking'.

I finally laid my hands on the lyrics in about 1993 from the fan club in Los Angeles. They arrived spiral bound in a red and black book, but even here there were ambiguities. They were not presented as the definitive versions. Rather, pieced together from what the band themselves could remember, what fans heard on the records, and fragments of whatever documentation might survive from studio sessions... and those weird computer printouts.

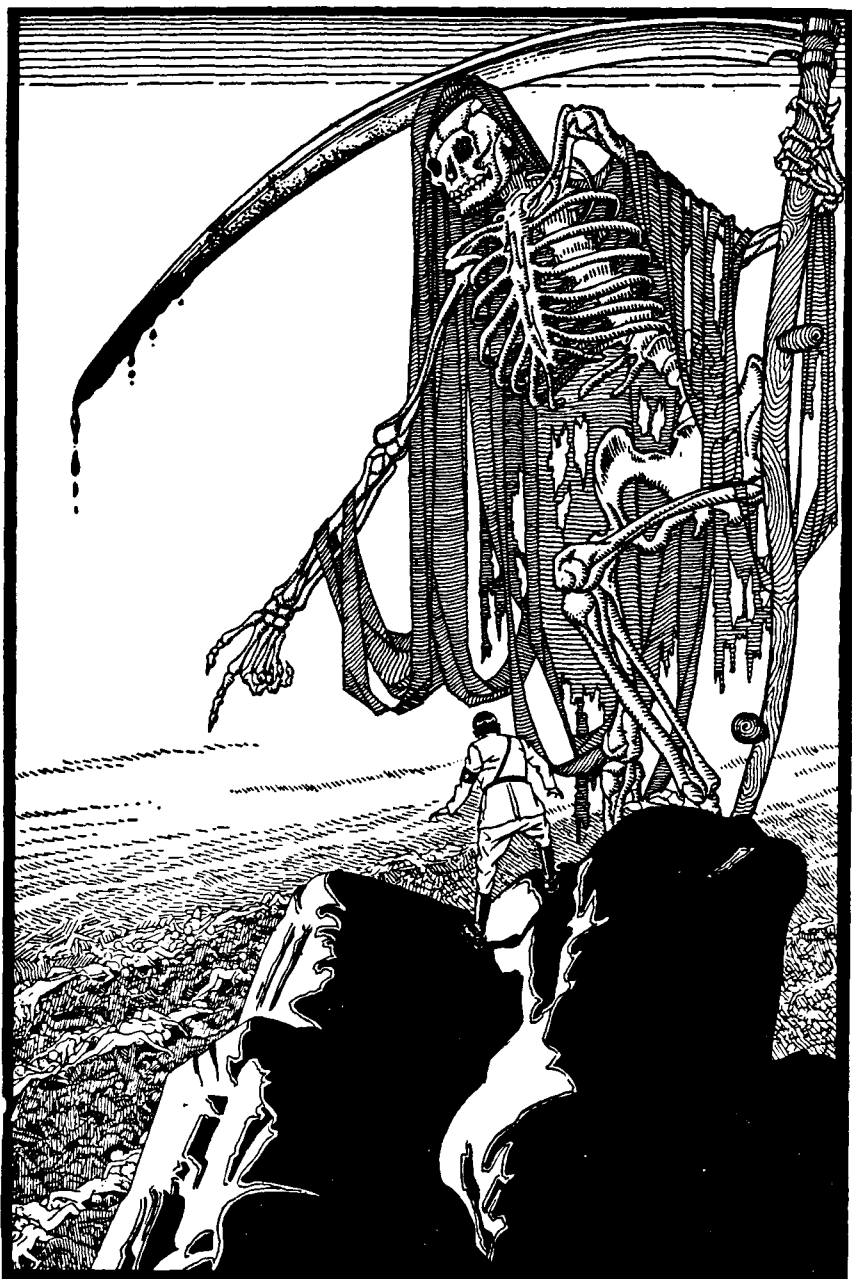
After a few years of digesting these bewildering texts, I think I might be ready to begin.

MIRRORS

'Mirrors are a negative space with a frame, and a place for your face they reveal.'

The image of the mirror runs like a golden thread throughout much of the Cult's output, chiefly in lyrics but also in sleeve art, and even the title of one LP. It extends even to the wearing of mirror shades, by singer Eric Bloom. Some of the more elusive mirrors include 'The Curse of the Hidden Mirrors', an unreleased song from the *St Cecilia* LP. This has been described as 'the mirror that confuses its viewer by delivering a mental riddle about the possibilities of what could be seen





in mirrors'. A concept important enough to warrant the possible reinscription of this song on the 2nd LP, although it never appeared.

There is the alchemists' magic glass in 'Workshop of the Telescopes', 'a lens of quartz and refract scope' which enables them to see with their eyes closed. By the time of the third album, this all-seeing potency has transformed its user into the 'Harvester of Eyes'... 'When I look inside your head, right up front to the back of your skull...you'd better get out of the way, and put on your eye glasses, cause I'm gonna take your eyes home with me'.

The narrative of this image culminates in the magic mirror of Dr John Dee, featured in *Imaginos* and described there in some detail. Dee was the Elizabethan alchemist and clergyman who helped this country's struggle against France by acting as a spy for the Queen; who knows what methods he used! Pearlman's vision of his magic mirror is a powerful one: '...a mirror carved of blackest obsidian, black volcanic glass, tempered with blood...obviously a magic mirror, it is nothing less than the Magna of Illusion.'

You note here the powerful contrast evoked by the red and black imagery, the black glass tempered with blood. This is the final culmination of another, closely related, strand of imagery, again attributable to Pearlman, an obsessive series of references to the Red and the Black.

Red and Black are colours frequently used in magic symbolism, and in Nazi insignia. 'The Red Dragon' was an ancient grimoire, one of the

bibles used by practitioners of the Black Arts; together with 'La Poule Noire' or 'The Black Hen'. 'The Red and The Black' is the first track on the *Tyranny and Mutation* LP. The original 'Le Rouge et Le Noir' is a novel by Stendahl, referring to the Military and the Church. This rock song turns out however to be a hymn of praise to the Canadian Mounted Police: 'red and black, it's their colour scheme'. However, no celebration of law and order this song - it's a celebration of death. Throughout the manic coke-fuelled tune the Mounties appear to be seized with blood-lust: 'Kill your man...Kill your man...it's all right'.

This song is a powerful reversal of the natural order of things; Pearlman knew he was onto something here, and applied the same formula of chaos to the whole LP. Side One of the LP is subtitled 'The Black' and Side Two 'The Red'; the two sides of vinyl become positive / negative images of each other. The first editions of the LP even extend this conceit to the record label, printed red on black one side, black on red the other...of especial significance is that *this* song was chosen to become the locus of this powerful mirror-image magic spell: it's a remake of a song on the first LP, 'I'm on the Lamb But I Ain't no Sheep'. One of their own talismanic charms, remade to work even more powerfully.

There are four tracks on each side; I wonder if, thematically and lyrically, each song contains enough images to 'answer' one of the songs on the other side. The 'Bungo pony on dogsled on ice', for example, seems to answer both the 'Baby Ice Dog' and the 'flights of black horsemen'. All the songs on the 'Black' side contain the word 'red', or refer to red imagery such as fire and blood, at least once. The black side, concluding with over twenty repetitions of the incantation 'Lucifer The Light', contradicts its own blackness by asserting its supremacy as the side of daylight, sunlight. All the songs on the 'Red' side contain the word 'black', or refer to black imagery such as darkness and night. Concluding with a song of praise to burial and regenerative rites and celebrating the 'ripe and ready grave', it asserts itself as the side of darkness and black. Heaven and Hell images also appear with alarming frequency -

either referred to directly, or by alluding to angels such as 'Teen Archer' or devils such as 'Flights of black horsemen'. Manifestations of the four ancient elements, Earth Air Fire and Water, are also programmed throughout the entire sequence of the record.

Tyranny and Mutation resembles an Astrologer's chart, an alchemist's diagram, a witch's spell; loaded with hidden signs and meanings, it's beyond literature waiting to be picked apart by an academic semiotician. Rather it is so steeped in ancient lore that it appears to be inscribed in stone. It was constructed by an evil genius.

NAZI GERMANY

'I am becalmed, lost to nothing, warm weather and Holocaust'.

'Most writers proved that they have absolutely no sense of humour', said Pearlman in 1976 of the *Secret Treaties* LP. 'They didn't understand the humour behind it, and so the final buildown was Lester Bangs' statement about "five Jewish kids who are Nazis", and they're not five Jewish kids, and they're not Nazis, but that was the final simplification of something that started out as a joke.'

With the rise of spiritualism, and interest in the occult across Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, there emerged certain devotees who became

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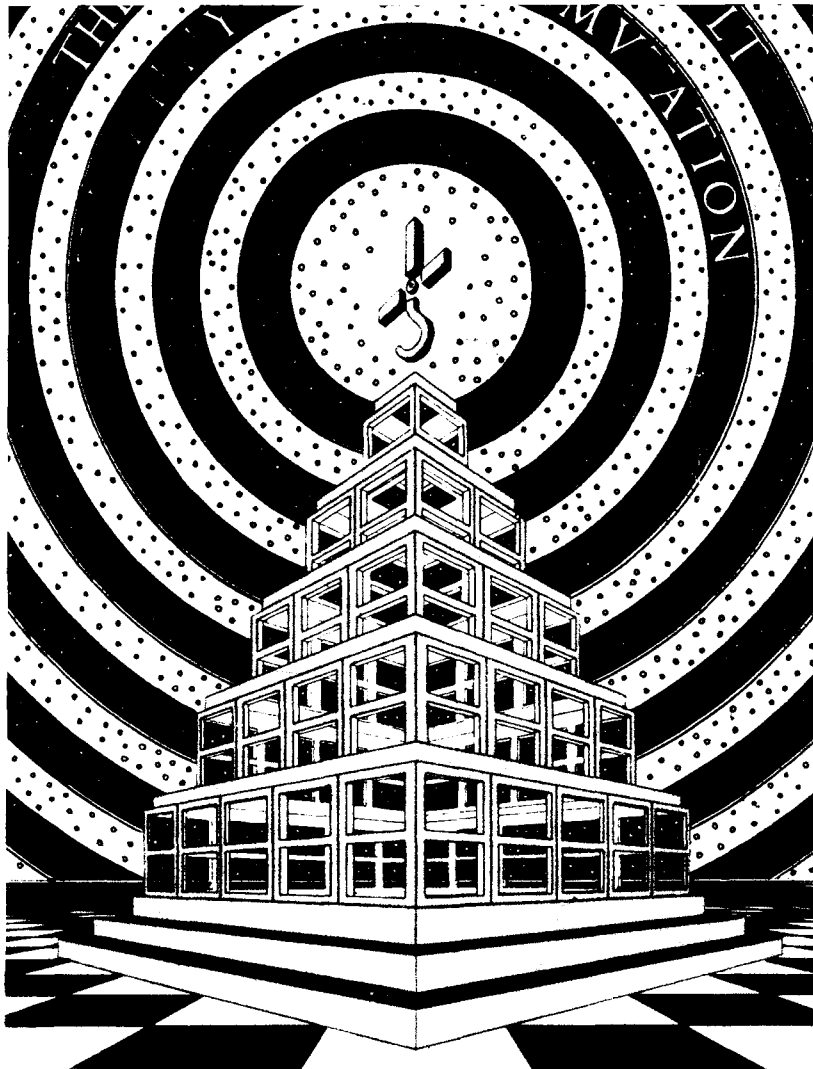
convinced there were satanic elements brewing in Nazi Germany. In this country, Lewis Spence propounded the view that Adolf Hitler had effectively sold his soul to the Prince of Darkness - and took Hitler's general behaviour as evidence, observing his manic behaviour at rallies, his epilepsy, his vacillation. At the same time he pointed out Germany's myths and legends, (the Faust legend for example) which all embodied the same notion of gaining terrible powers by striking a bargain with the dark lord. Dennis Wheatley, the English writer, similarly intrigued by this strange idea, would write a story called 'They Used Dark Forces', which outlined a plot to assassinate Hitler, using satanic rites. Wheatley was persuaded that satanism was being practiced in Germany during the war, although never believed that Hitler's inner circle were sacrificing babies on an altar of blood to attain their evil ends.

This particular 20th century fantasy probably springs from all kinds of sources, and innate hysteria: the only factual occult-ish connection is that Hitler had his own personal astrologer, and believed in fortune-telling. However, these myths (and many others surrounding Hitler and Nazi Germany) are alluded to in the film *Hitler: A Film from Germany*, made in 1975 by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg. 'Appalled by the extensiveness of German support for Hitler', writes Susan Sontag, in her preface to the book of this film, 'Syberberg calls the Germans "a Satanic people".'

The Blue Öyster Cult album *Secret Treaties* alludes to the Nazi-occult fantasy, clearly something Sandy Pearlman had read up on and was intrigued by. Thematically there is underlying it a hidden explanation for the real causes of the 2nd World War. Pearlman inserts hint on the inner sleeve, alluding to a non-existent book:

Rossignol's curious, albeit simply titled book, the *Origins of a World War*, spoke in terms of secret treaties, drawn up between the Ambassadors from Plutonia and Desdinova the foreign minister. These treaties founded a secret science from the stars. Astronomy. The career of evil.

The theme is taken up in the long track 'Astronomy', and the hymn to the German fighter plane ME 262 (planes which exceeded the fighting power of the Spitfire; Hitler could conceivably have won the Battle of Britain with these war machines if he hadn't decided to use them as bombers instead). 'Must these Englishmen live that I might die?' runs the refrain in 'ME 262', incidentally another Pearlman lyric with subliminal mirrors and red/black imagery planted throughout. The sleeve art, featuring paintings by Ron Lesser, goes one further. It almost tells a short story, like a two-panel comic strip; the American edition has reworkings of the same images in full colour, on the inner



bag. (Follow the changes to the pictures closely - this is like *The Mezzotint* by M R James).

The Blue Öyster Cult are pictured in 1970s stage gear. Eric Bloom is holding four dogs on leashes. These are German wolfhounds. The band are posing by an ME 262 fighter plane. They might be Luftwaffe pilots, were it not for their dress, but they exhibit the same fetishism and fascination with leather and insignia. Bloom's cape is red and black; one Bouchard is in a leather jacket; the other has Luftwaffe wings on his T-shirt. The pilot, needless to remark, is the Grim Reaper.

In the second picture, what has happened? The plane remains on a deserted airstrip, and we can now clearly see its wing marking to be the Cult's chaos insignia. There is nobody in the pilot seat. Are the band members on board? Pouncey has suggested a connection with the Hell's Angels in 'Transmaniacan MC'; the bike riders become fighter pilots. The killing of the black guy at Altamont by Hell's Angels thus becomes a human sacrifice. And to make the connection absolutely clear, what has

happened to the dogs? They have all had their throats cut and are lying dead on the airstrip.

Another examination of the front cover shows five men lurking in the background; they were sombreros and three of them have Zapata-like moustaches. The word 'LOPEZ' is just visible on a tower in the far background. Are they in South America, reputed hiding place for many Nazi war criminals? This was another popular fantasy about Nazis, most famously perpetrated by the film *The Boys From Brazil*.

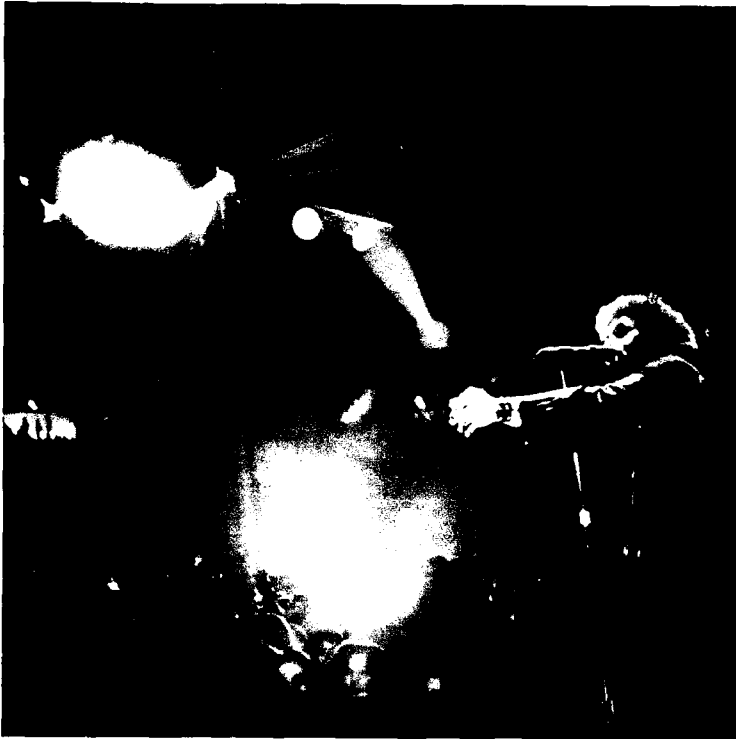
There are probably other Nazi links waiting to be unearthed throughout the Cult's songs and artworks; undoubtedly the interest in Nazi insignia is there, but only as one symbol amongst many others. The swastika after all is far more ancient than this century; it is one of many antecedents that evolved into the Rosicrucian cross (and see below). The Nazis presumably only used it because it looked good, or was intended to bring good luck. The flirtation with such imagery (and satanic imagery come to that) by most Heavy Metal bands is indecent and crass. We would not associate the Blue Öyster Cult with any of this. It's the idea of the Nazis, the idea that they might be something like the ultimate biker gang, the ultimate esoteric cult...



THE ROSICRUCIAN CULT

'See, that's the deal we made, just to join the Öyster Cult'

The first LP invites you to join the 'Cult', while hinting at other secret societies and occult gatherings, ancient Umberto Eco ones like The Rosicrucians and alchemists; or 20th century ones like the Hell's Angels, outlaw riders in the Canadian Mounted Police, or just plain wasted alcoholic lowlifes gathering in shady bars. The suggestion seems



to be that there is little difference between any of these. The Transmaniac MC are one of the most sinister, a chapter of the Hell's Angels riding 'Satan's Hog', heading 'South from Altamont' where they have just despatched the unfortunate victim who tried to get too near to Mick Jagger. Celebrating this human sacrifice they roar 'We're pain, we're steel, a plot of knives'.

Listen to 'Before The Kiss, A Redcap'. If you ignored the poetical construction of the lyrics, you'd be lulled into thinking this appears to be a song about some sleazy dive, Conry's Bar, where low-lives gather to ingest illicit substances, until the song shifts up a gear and speeds you down some Lost Highway where thrills are as cheap as gas. The high-octane verses over jazzy ninth-chords grow weirder, insisting on the 'motif of the rose', before reprising the first verse where the bar scene is played out again - this time the 'redcap' underscored by Allen Lanier's organ. Given this chance to re-examine it, you'll find this bar too is full of roses, clutched by the patrons whose thoughts are too big for their skulls, taking ringside seats. A Rosicrucian gathering in secret.

The name 'Rosicrucian' comes from the founder of the movement, Christian Rosenkreutz, who allegedly died in 1484 after becoming an initiate in the Holy Land. Later, the cult would claim that Raymond VI, a Count of Toulouse, was also a distinguished Rosicrucian, despite the fact that he lived nearly 200 years before the cult was even established. This is rather akin to Surrealists making Surrealists out of artists who existed long before the term or movement even had any meaning!

There's a link to Astrology too: the Danish Astrologer Max Heindel, who claims to have been visited by some form of astral beings in Berlin, who not only informed him of the Rosicrucian destiny and mission, but also gave him precise instructions to re-founding the ancient society. Result - Heindel built a Rosicrucian Temple south of Los Angeles and completed it in 1920, where it has been frequented ever since by West Coast students of the occult and the esoteric.

The motif of the rose - also claimed by Rosicrucians to have evolved from such ancient symbols as the Maltese cross, Celtic crosses, the swastika, the Egyptian Cross and various American Indian symbols. 'A rose and not from anywhere that you would know or I would care', say the Cult, alluding to its lost origins. 'A cross, a circle and a rose are all that is needed to explain the world', is the belief of a Rosicrucian conspirator. The rose also figures in dream-interpretations, and in magic traditions, as the achievement of the self and the blossoming of personality.

The Blue Oyster Cult see a more sinister connection in the 'Seven Screaming Diz-Busters, who lurked behind the rose'. These acolytes follow Lucifer the Light, even though they 'just can't stand the light'; and obsessively finish their song with a count of their magical number. Seven, incidentally, is also significant in the world of Alchemy. There are

'seven stages of perfection' for initiation into the sanctuary of the Alchemist; The 17th century scholar Khunrath believed the seven stages could be achieved 'Christian-cabbalistically, divino-magically, and even physico-chemically'.



DRUGS

'Big city madness, comfort my soul'

And speaking of those physical chemicals...what Cult would be complete without its own magic medicines, prescriptions, rewards for the initiate, like the murderous assassins of the 12th century out of their heads on hash balls? There's a definite progression to the Blue Oyster Cult's flirtation with illicit substances - they start with the mild stuff but they're riding the big H within only two LPs. On the innocent California album, it's unclear what they're on, but it's as sweet as 'Bonomo's Turkish Taffy'; there are mushrooms in the song 'Ragamuffin Dumpling'; and the warning that if 'you spend your time on candy then your dentist gets annoyed'. The sunshiney good trips are written all over the good-vibe grooves here. By the time of the first 1971 LP however, the Summer of Love is over and the tone is already darkening; a morality tale is constructed out of the misadventures of three pushers in 'Then Came the Last Days of May', and the pill-poppers in Conry's bar, taking their inverted Holy Communion of reds and wine, have already had their

story told above. Although we might think by side two an hallucinogenic has taken hold of the lover who sees his woman's face as a foot, in fact that song is based very firmly on reality.

By the time of *Tyranny and Mutation*, we're onto the hard stuff all right; the whole LP is a cocaine fuelled nightmare, from which we're coming down to face the stark reality of resurrection myths by the very last track. The listener has indeed 'Overdosed on Life itself', only to mutate into the sinister alchemist / experimenter on the third album whose lament is 'I've opened up my veins too many times, and the poison's in my heart and in my pride'. But it sets his mind on fire, makes him a flaming telepath, a monstrous scientist who like the other Faustian characters in the Cult mythos, sees right to the back of your brain.

Lucifer the Light - the myth, the figure, reappears as frequently as the villain in a silent movie, casting light and shade across the screen.

GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST CINEMA

'Deep in the heart of Germany, Lucy clutched her breast in fear'

'Mysticism and magic, the dark forces to which Germans have always been more than willing to commit themselves, had flourished in the face of death on the battlefields.'

Some of the same themes touched upon in the above have already been stated in images and stories in certain films from this school of cinema. Read *The Haunted Screen*, where its author Eisner speaks of 'the apocalyptic doctrine of Expressionism'. I don't just mean the horror films, although *Nosferatu* might be the most obvious place for a student to start, as the Cult delivered the story of this most princely of Vampyres in song on their *Spectres* LP. The five members of the band are Jewish-American, born and bred in New York; there are several Expressionist films which explore key Jewish myths, to great effect. The most powerful would be Paul Wegener's *The Golem* (1920), which depicts the use of cabbalistic symbols written on a parchment to bring a man made of clay to life. This story would have been a natural for the Cult to tackle, but they never got around to it. The energies of the Expressionist cinema scene weren't confined to a local place and time; at least two of its directors (Fritz Lang and Paul Leni) escaped Nazi Germany and made it to America, to work in Hollywood and bring their secret learnings regarding magic lighting effects and horrifying stories to a mass audience. There's a continuum here that could easily

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have fed directly into the Hollywood horror and monster movies, which have been another influence on The Blue Öyster Cult. There are other fragments of interest; the Expressionist cinema's use of darkness and light, day and night, and fascination with lighting effects; linked to their interest in mirrors, particularly distorting mirrors. There is even a whiff of Alchemy in the film *Destiny*, which renders an apothecary's laboratory as an alchemist's workshop, with a 'satanic atmosphere', 'straight out of Hoffmann',

MUSIC

'I hear the music daylight disc'

Oh, yes, the music. In an article devoted to the thematic and lyrical statements of these records, it seems churlish to ignore the music. Listening really is the way in - the melodies and the hooks seduce you, the power chords charm you, the solos lure you into the snare. Through the music you fall under the spell of the magus, and wake up a changed man. The three key players are lead guitarist Donald Roeser, vocalist and stun guitarist Eric Bloom, and keyboard player Allen Lanier. The Bouchard brothers played drums and bass, yet mustn't be discounted as they wrote so many of the songs. They all had magic names once - for the California album they were named respectively Buck Dharma, Jesse Python, La Verne, Prince Omega.

Yet one so often wonders if these talented musicians knew the full extent of how they were being used by Pearlman to realise his 'warpoid rock and roll vision'. I think of magician Karswell, as depicted in the movie *Night of the Demon* (an adaptation of the supernatural classic tale *Casting The Runes* by M R James). When Karswell summons a magic wind from the devil to confound and scatter his opponents, there is just this suggestion that perhaps he isn't actually in control of it at all...who is the master, who is the acolyte? In 1978 Savage Pencil drew a comic strip referring to a Clash LP produced by Sandy Pearlman; his technique involved simply giving them scads of obscure literature to give them ideas, including The complete works of HP Lovecraft, *Ancient Monuments of the British Isles*, *Moby Dick* and *Earth Magic*. 'Wot rhymes with megalithic site?' wondered a puzzled Joe Strummer.

The music of Blue Öyster Cult may be in the Heavy Metal tradition of power chords, heavy bass and fast solos, but each of these things is executed with total originality. The Bouchards favoured the key of A minor for most of their songs; a minor key always adds the required touch of darkness at any event. Lanier's organ was always gothic, understated, and sparingly used. Bloom's vocals may not be all that powerful, but he has on occasion managed that kind of ancientness and anonymity that suggests an old man of the mountains telling his tales. And we have already brought out the superlatives to describe Roeser's soaring guitar solos.

I always enjoy the uncanny production sound of the first LP - touches of echo and reverb, and its heady editing collisions. These edits serve to weave the fragments of the stories together; the way 'Screams' segues perfectly into 'She's as beautiful as a foot'; the heavy bass reverberation at the end of 'Workshop of the Telescopes', suggesting some dark machine of alchemy, followed by the sheer delight of rainbows, colour and light in 'Redeemed'.

The 'amphetamine rush' sound of the second LP, where every track structured to recreate the thrill of an ounce of good white stuff reaching the brain, approximated by the sudden turns into up-tempo superfast thrashing, on 'The Red and The Black' and 'Seven Screaming Diz-Busters'. 'In our minds we were trying to be like [the] Mahavishnu [Orchestra] with vocals,' says Albert Bouchard.

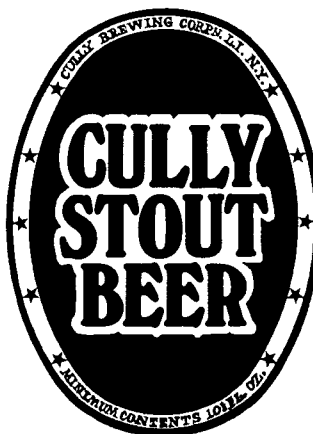
'Cities On Flame With Rock N Roll' is the track which, I suspect, an infidel could produce as evidence that the Blue Öyster Cult are little more than posturing heavy metal buffoons on the order of AC/DC or Metallica. I disagree...this showstopping tune is built from power chords that could quite literally flatten the whole of Manhattan, while Buck Dharma's interventions show how he plays with it like a bauble...later songs revisit this same theme, the reincarnation of themselves as unstoppable monsters (Godzilla, Cultosaurus Erectus, Harvester of Eyes) while the power of stadium rock was rekindled in 'The Marshall Plan'.

These records were all studio productions in the New York studio by Sandy Pearlman and his partner Murray Krugman. Their other claims to fame, naturally, include being the masterbrains behind The Dictators and Pavlov's Dog.

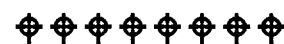
'I think Rock n Roll has a heart of darkness', said Pearlman, '...and I think records should be bigger than life, that's why I like the Blue Öyster Cult so much. You can be a sopor hound much easier than you can be Alexander the Great; you can get drunk a lot easier than you can move the destiny of hearts, minds and the world.'

The Punchline.. "THE JOKE'S ON YOU"

Yet the name, The Blue Öyster Cult? It came out of drunkenness. It was a joke. It's an anagram of Cully Stout Beer. Meltzer and Pearlman were getting drunk one night on a sickly flat beer called Cully Stout. 'Meltzer's glazed eyes had become riveted to the bottle in his hand...' is how Pearlman tells this bizarre tale, 'then he suddenly jumped up yelling Trolleybus Cue!...he explained it was an anagram of Cully Stout Beer - he'd been staring at the label and shuffling the letters around in his head! A typical Meltzer brain exercise!' The other permutations they come up with included Stout Belly Cure, Trycolute Blues, and finally Pearlman came up with the words Blue Öyster Cult.



'There was something about the evening and the situation which told me that the words would fit the bill perfectly...we'd call the band Blue Öyster Cult!'



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The Blue Öyster Cult book of lyrics was created by the Blue Öyster Cult fan club, PO Box 931324, Los Angeles CA 90093, USA.

Morning Final, No 3, September 1990 (Blue Öyster Cult fanclub fanzine)

Morning Final, No 4, December 1990



Records

The Stalk-Forrest Group *St Cecilia LP*

A beautiful record, dedicated to the patron saint of music. Early sword and sorcery-ish themes, filled with strange tales and characters straight out of children's books. My favourite 'Ragamuffin Dumpling', whose lyrics I've never been able to untangle satisfactorily, but love it for the incongruous line 'I want the sandwich in your pail, and a boat that sails!' The country-influenced 'Gil Blanco County' is beautiful, but untypical. This LP betrays their Grateful Dead and Byrds influences, despite their being an East Coast band, and the sound is filled with light and sunshine, as compared with the three increasingly nocturnal, Saturnine LPs which would follow. This Ain't the Summer of Love...

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With lyrics mostly by Richard Meltzer; he clearly wrote 'Arthur Comics' on this record, as he's a great comics fan! Also gets a writing credit on classic songs 'Stairway to the Stars', 'She's As Beautiful as a Foot', 'Teen Archer' and 'Cagey Cretins'. Meltzer is more well known as a writer and eccentric rock critic; his book *The Aesthetics of Rock* is pretty goddamn essential, and I must be the only fan in the world who liked *Gulcher* which was remaindered in the UK as quickly as you like. His enthusiasm is boundless; he seems as knowledgeable on sport as much as rock music, likewise his collection of bottle caps and comic books. This prompted one wag to write an affectionate satire of his effusive style and put it on the back of the second Pebbles LP.

St Cecilia was never issued. It was recorded for the Elektra label in February-May 1970 in California, thus known as their California album (the band were based in NYC). Shelved by its producer, Jac Holzman. 'Had it come out, would have been considered a milestone of progressive psychedelic acid rock'. Recent boot issue of this became available in 1998, in a dreadful sleeve.

Two songs from the LP would be salvaged to make it onto the first LP. 'I'm on the Lamb but I ain't no sheep' and 'Sir Rastus Bear' which became 'Redeemed'.

Other previous incarnations of the Cult, starting in 1967 in Stony Brook, were The Cows and The Soft White Underbelly; the latter band included Roeser, Albert Bouchard and Allen Lanier, with Andy Winters and Les Braunstein. Again, the SWU late 1960s recordings (many of which shade into the *St Cecilia* LP) remain unissued officially. Joke references to these names would resurface on the much later *Cultosaurus Erectus* LP.



Blue Öyster Cult

COLUMBIA C 31063 (1971)

Cover art by Bill Gawlik, 'the most talented cab driver in New York City'. With rapidograph and draughtsman's tools he suggests an infinite impossible perspective under a night sky, delineates doors and windows that lead nowhere, and a railway line to infinity. The Cult's symbol floating above the front cover in silver. It was Gawlik who first used this symbol, which looks like an inverted question mark, without knowing what it was; Pearlman looked it up in his books on alchemy and discovered it was an early alchemical symbol for the element lead, and also used by the ancients to symbolise Saturn, or chaos and destruction.

Tyrrany and Mutation

COLUMBIA KC 32017 (1973)

Another Gawlik sleeve, this one with a strange tower emanating concentric circles. Verso shows some eerie periscopes in a bleak, twin-mooned sci-fi landscape.

Secret Treaties

COLUMBIA PC 32858 (1974)

Original title was to have been *Power In The Hands Of Fools*; and to accompany the Adolf Hitler sample in 'ME 262', there would have been a song called 'Bormann the Chauffeur'. A lot of people didn't appreciate the irony; some observers even alleged that the Blue Öyster Cult symbol appeared on flags in Nazi Germany.

Imaginos

CBS 460036 A (1988)

Fantastic Simon Marsden photographs, which aspire to the condition of a painting by Caspar David Friedrich. No finer choice of imagery exists. I haven't said much about this record as I hope it will come as a pleasant surprise to the attentive listener; you will find a series of elaborate payoffs to all the clues suggested in the first three records, including a monumental reworking of 'Astronomy' by the huge guitar orchestra formed especially for this record. For a perfectly written essay on this LP, read Timothy D'Arch Smith's review of it in *Peepin in A Seafood Store: Some Pleasures of Rock Music* (Michael Russell, 1992).

Seattle 1975 bootleg tape

Notable for a fine version of 'Seven Screaming Diz-Busters' which ends with what I call the 'Lucifer' rap...I'm talking about Lucifer down in Seattle tonight', boasts the singer, as he recounts the lurid tale of how he signed away his soul to Mr Pitchfork, and the very next day secured a recording contract from CBS. Sadly, I don't know how this little morality plays finishes, as my copy runs out. Taken from an FM stereo broadcast, so I'm sure more complete copies are available. Plus versions of those live-only favourites 'Buck's Boogie' and 'Maserati GT'.



The Dictators:

The Dictators Go Girl Crazy

EPIC EPC 80767 (1975)

As a tribute to the producers, the sleeve thanks Krugman and Pearlman as 'the tag team champions pull another chestnut out of the fire'...with the infamous locker-room sleeve picturing a grinning Handsome Dick Manitoba, the wrestler turned lead singer.

Manifest Destiny

ASYLUM RECORDS K 53061 (1977)

Recorded at the Record Plant in New York. Although this band were decidedly more blue collar than the intellectual Cult, the sleeve for this one is a very good tongue-in-cheek articulation of the Rock Dream of global domination. The Dictators were also rock writers, and got involved with Pearlman through mutual friend Richard Meltzer.

Pavlov's Dog

Pampered Menial

COLUMBIA (1976)

Don't have original issue of this. David Surkamp is bonkers - mad falsetto quavery vocalist which probably puts most people off. Highly unusual sound for rock lineup, with violin and mellotron. If only they still made records like this...



With thanks to Edwin Pouncey, without whose ideas and encouragement this article would not have been written.

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2 x hard-editors in the
disk mode**



sinister tale of an American suicide cult. The organ loop behind the speech is the very essence of tension. It gets scarier...but hear it for yourself. It's a superb valediction to this mighty CD. Jeck has the ambition to tackle grand themes (death, disasters, spirituality, fear) and a flair for innovation in his methods that puts many other novelty-act turntablists to shame. His skill for handling records, and milking them for hidden meanings, comes over so strongly that you

Philip Jeck

Surf

TOUCH TO:36 (1998)

Awe-inspiring noise and loop explorations from the unique Mr Jeck. He first came my way with a track on the *Teleform* compilation, also from the Touch label; having long been intrigued and fascinated by that snippet of roaring swiftness, I'm more than delighted to encounter a full seven tracks by this fellow. What we got here, boys and gals, is tremendous power achieved by great economy of means. Jeck is a one-man symphonic composer, yet does it on a DIY scale - he opts mainly for sampling old vinyl records, and collaging tape rather than 24 track or hard disk editing; and favours the clunkiness of a charity-shop Dansette record player for his works. Both these strategies add a patina of 'oldness' to the recordings which is attractive enough in itself, but it's the surprisingly vast power he summons from these barely-working devices that's the main attraction for me.

The power is best demonstrated by 'Box Of Lamb', an episode nothing short of an earthquake cracking open the land and sky before you, while drawing your attention to a barely-audible tiny looped melody tinkling strangely in the distance. It creates a palpable imaginary space - you could never hear things like this in real life, yet you feel you're entering a soundworld so truly solid you could wander in it for hours. 'Spirits Up' is another success on an equally large scale, built from small sound events pieced together and growing organically into an incalculable size. Like seeing a conjuror spinning plates (thousands of them at once!), you wonder how can he keep control of so many loops, so many layers, without collapsing into a pit of sludge? This track is not merely impressive, it's genuinely elegiac and as moving as any composed music you'll ever hear.

The greater proportion of the disc tends towards masses of solid grey noises wiping everything clean like a stormcloud (see the CD cover for a manifestation of this), and throbbing loops as mesmeric as an entire nest of cobras. If there are more 'narrative' fragments, these would include loops of nearly-recognisable music, for the most part rendered into everlasting moments of repeated bliss, but sometimes remade into an incoherent chattering insanity such as a Christian Marclay might prefer. When speech occurs, on the haunting final track 'I Just Wanted To Know', it's an eerie whispering that portrays either the comforting words by a dying man's bedside, or perhaps the more

can almost share the joy of handling these tactile, vinyl artefacts along with the creator. Highly recommended.

ED PINSENT

Pierre Bastien

Musiques Paralloïdres

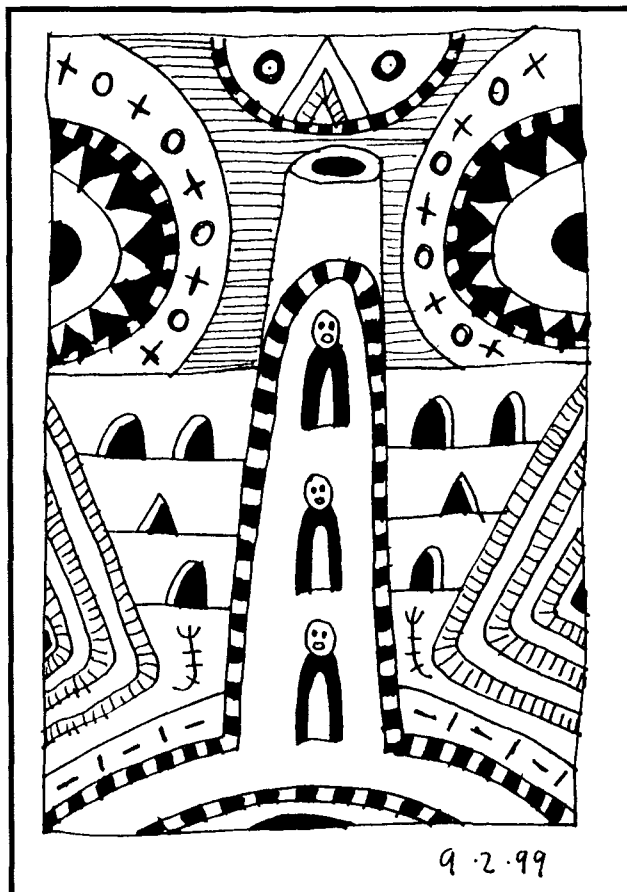
BELGIUM, LOWLANDS LOW012 (ND) [1999]

A fun CD from this veteran of avant-garde frolics.

Frenchman Bastien's a dab hand with his Mecanno set, and has a 20-year history of constructing and touring with his own unusual home-made musical instruments, which are able to play themselves in short repeating bursts. On this record, a development of that same idea of 'paralloïdal' music, he developed a prepared record player not unlike a John Cage (whom he admires) prepared piano. A cheap portable turntable - kind of thing you might see in a 1950s teenager's salon catalogue photo - has a curved metal strip fitted that varies the performance of the tone arm, so that groove-playing is mechanically interrupted. A record is played at the wrong speed, and once played forward is immediately played backwards.

What a lark, eh? Shame the actual CD's a bit of a yawner - but it makes a nice contrast with Jeck above, because where Jeck is serious and deep, Bastien is jolly and humorous. He generates a cartoon-like feel, not unlike a Disney early Silly Symphony animation where comic skeletons play their own ribcages - that's what the repeated marimba patterns suggest. With old scratchy 78s, playing their mutant tango and fox-trot rhythms, an old-fashioned air hangs over some of these tracks - but Bastien isn't radically remaking anything, neither poking fun at the past or trying to reinvent it. In fact, he's simply inventing an imaginary orchestra to accompany himself in the playroom, as he picks up his muted trumpet and blasts out a few obligattos of blurtish blither. This is why the six longish tracks can be a bit much - we gotta wait until he's finished soloing.

Bastien boasts of some impeccable influences, among them Guy Debord, and has worked with sometime Nurse With Wound collaborator Jac Berrocal; but he's also coming it from a rather intellectual angle (he studied literature at the Sorbonne in Paris), and not a terribly musically inspired one. Still, when you think of him on stage playing



9.2.99

The Sound Projector 6ixth issue 1999

as a one-man band with his self-performing instruments, there's a whiff of the music hall there...and a low-grade Surrealism too, like he just stepped out of a Magritte postcard.

ED PINSENT

Fennesz Plays 7" single

MEGO RECORDS MEGO 020 (1998)

Sourcing pop records, Viennese electronicist Christian Fennesz resamples and restitches them into something unimaginably *other* than what they were meant to be. They were originally up-tempo, now they're slowed down into something even more frighteningly turgid than an early Swans LP. They once had lyrics, now they have only an inhuman moan that's barely discernible from the remaining instrumental backdrops. In short their initial meaning and significance has not only been questioned, it's been radically reshaped along the lines Fennesz desires, moulded to his scientific will. This is welcome. I open up the pages of *Mojo* magazine with feelings of guilt as I take my furtive pleasures. The writers there, exhuming the glorious past of 'rock's rich tapestry' (as Julie Burchill once designated it) celebrate the fixed pleasures in the Pantheon with an almost pornographic delight. In so doing, the meaning of everything becomes fixed in stone, ground into the 'Ten Commandments' of Rock, reinforcing its monolithic status, making every fucking album released into a mere sub-set of *Sergeant Pepper*. The only antidote as far as I can see is to remake the music, reform the intractable vinyl diktat into something more approachable, more in tune with the future, than something rooted in the past. Thus Fennesz has not only made a fantastic recording here, he's leading the way for the listening public. We need every single 'great' 45 remade into a radical answer record along these lines. Kill the fucking history of rock music stone dead, right now!

ED PINSENT

Y; rather it shows how complex our lives can be, how rich with responses and resonances any given micro-second of musical existence is shown to be, when given new fiery life under the editing tools of John Wall.

Particularly interesting this time is that he's included a number of samples of real time live music, I think principally on the final track, taken from live improvisations by John Edwards on the bass, Peter Shepperd on violin, and others including two cellists and two clarinetists. Being a self-confessed control freak, Wall would not work with live improvising musicians out of choice, but he has responded to challenges from London Musicians Collective to do his thing in a live setting. He responds well to the uninhibited noise-making of John Edwards, but would like to pluck a particularly resonant bass strum out of time, and put it precisely where he wants it within a sampling composition. Equally interesting has been an experiment with Peter Shepperd, who attempted to score and learn a piece composed by Wall out of cut-ups of Shepperd's own playing.

The man should be holding a masterclass for anyone who wants to learn how to best use the sampler; he could show a lot of young learners in this field a thing or two. A fine package also designed by Wall, a digipak bound in cloth like a book with art paper inserts, and sealed in a vinylite wallet. A man who knows his materials.

ED PINSENT

UtterPsalm, PO Box 14056, London N5 2WG

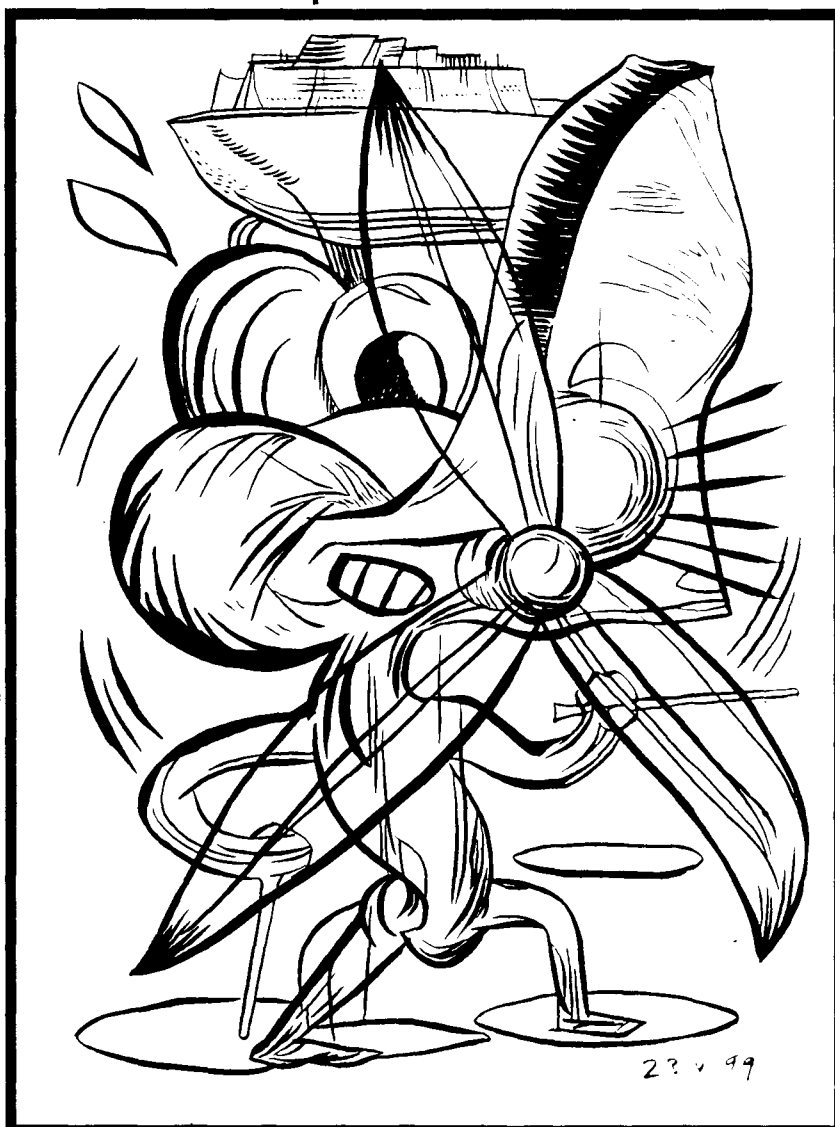
John Wall

Fractuur

UTTERPSALM CD3 (1998)

Second own label release from Mr John Wall, this great UK original. The powerful and inventive music results from his labour-intensive and highly meticulous editing work with a sampler, long hours spent listening to records, judicious selection of vital moments, and combining them in explosive configurations that betoken a rare genius. Like a poet who knows his best friend is the wastepaper basket, Wall destroys or abandons work in progress if it's heading down a clichéd or familiar route, and is extremely judicious and selective in what he chooses to release. Unlike those in this field who prefer to leave the edges raw and bleeding, letting you hear the splices or tone-arm lifting off a sampled vinyl LP, John Wall's art conceals the joins. This is like a gigantic mosaic for the ears, so skilfully pieced together that it appears to have evolved like natural lichen and algae formations across a huge cavern wall. The dynamics, however, can be truly unexpected; constantly subverting familiarity, Wall presents startling changes in mood and pitch. You will never be able to figure out the direction any piece is moving. At the same time, he's an architect - creating a very convincing illusory space of sound with ruthless precision. On 'Statis' you hear some violin samples that simply defy gravity, floating there like solid fulgurites in the sky. These constructions are built to last; as a sonic draughtsman, he's motivated to draw every single brick on the blueprint.

However, he's not simply 'clever'; this music is deeply moving, albeit never in a very straightforward way. A mix of conflicting emotions are evoked, often in the same second of the passage of time, as though three of your past lives were coming back to haunt you simultaneously. Not least from mixing Swans with classical Chamber music, or any other rough mix you could never trace even though the sources are in a catalogue printed herein. This doesn't suggest that Brand X of music will always trigger Emotion



MODERN



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Things Make Patterns As They Will

AUSTRALIA, CAMERA OBSCURA RECORDS CAM 024CD (1999)

A respectable enough side project from the main man behind Salamander, this trip features Sean Connaughty who dishes out lashings of syrupy lead guitar, and slips a few of his oil paintings onto the CD covers. The music divides clearly into two modes, long and monotonous proggy droney jams on the one hand, and pastoral folksy acoustic songs on the other. My preference plumps for the former, since I tend to prefer instrumental music anyhow - and though these jams take a while to catch fire, it has to be said the players dig into some deep and dark wah-wah feedback solos when the heat turns on. They rely very heavily on effects pedals to arrive at this point though, as most modern prog, psych and space rock players do; without the tape delay, wah-wah and phase, these solos would mean very little. Still, at least they're simple, two-string solos, and rarely lapse into excessive ego-tripping - except when 14 minutes into 'Europa', a show-off axe-wielder does indeed take the stand and ruins the druggy trance thus far established. Derived almost totally from spontaneous sessions recorded at home. One for the Mandrax crowd I'll wager.

ED PINSENT

Gentle Tasady

In The Mind's Eye Of A Blind Tasady

AUSTRALIA, CAMERA OBSCURA RECORDS CAM 023CD (1999)

An interminable and rather dull record from two Minnesota players, Erik Wivinus and Eric Horferber. The former plays in a band called Salamander (as does Sean Connaughty - see next). These gents purport to align themselves with the dark experimental worlds of David Tibet and Steve Stapleton, which as far as I can hear means we get lots of slowly sliding guitars, found taped voice samples, and an overall formless grinding. They spread jumbo-sized jars of digital delay

over their inept playing to deliver that wonderful 'I live at the bottom of a deep well' sound, which also invokes instant awe and mystery - for some listeners at any rate. However, that's just for starters. By track three, we're back on Pink Floyd territory with the more straightforward 'Sad Wheel of the Seasons'. There may be more transcendent moments of sublime space-rock later on, but to be honest I couldn't face hearing any more of this gloomy and portentous CD.

ED PINSENT



Salamander

Red Mantra

AUSTRALIA, CAMERA OBSCURA RECORDS CAM 017CD (1998)

...and here is Salamander, revealed in all their glory in an LP which might as well be cut from the same cloth as the one above. Why not simply issue it as a double-LP formatted release? Same paintings, same lead guitarist, same even split between songs and solos. Well, it's churlish to complain because there is some very acceptable guitar work going on here, even if I find there isn't much actual fretwork or fingering skills to admire in the same way you'd admire say a John Cipollina, Jorma Kaukonen, Randy California, or even a Nick Salomon. Connaughty's solos don't take off into the stratosphere, but perhaps they're not intended to; instead, aping Tangerine Dream, Ash Ra Tempel and Pink Floyd, they map out very spacey, cloudy worlds, with

enough signposts to satisfy a curious Tolkien-reading, Discworld-inhabiting listener who cares to dwell here and explore a while.

ED PINSENT

The Land of Nod

Translucent

OCHRE RECORDS OCH007LCD (1999)

Following on from last year's 10" EP, here's a full LP length release by this anonymous duo from Cheltenham. It's a suite of ten instrumental tracks all rendered via synth and guitar, with occasional machine drumming. The latter tracks resemble that dull Pink Floyd period - where they were hooked on 'Careful With That Axe Eugene' - while the former spacey ones do little to improve on The Cosmic Couriers sound. I don't dig it, and I just don't care for this form of imitation brand cosmic piffle when you can so easily get the real thing - but then I'm clearly in the minority, since there are many more generous listeners than I who welcome such retrograde releases, and other contemporary bands like Azusa Plane, Windy and Carl and Flying Saucer Attack (all namechecked by Phil McMullen in the press release here) are seen, not as dippy copycats, but as a coagulation of young enlightened ones who all admit to these same hip psych and Krautrock influences. Still, to their credit, The Land of Nod don't want to be Robbie Williams...a certain amount of underground success

would be nice', they told the local paper in February this year when asked if the Brit-Awards ceremony beckoned. A nice sleeve: ochre and red tinted photographs of pastoral fields suggest what it might be like to drop acid on a sunny day in the country.

ED PINSENT

Various Artists,

Decalogue mini-LP

OCHRE RECORDS OCH033

Featuring Amp, Magnog,

Grimble Grumble, Mör, Stylus, 90° South

Six bands, one track each - so this sampler's an entertaining enough package with some decent sounds, of which few outstay their welcome...two American bands, four from the British Isles. My favourite might just be the

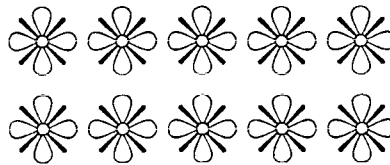
PSYCHIDELIA

intriguing Grumble Grumble episode, a Chicago band remixed by UHR, sounding like a very sick Hip-Hop track meeting The Residents on a foggy day. The rest of side one is in like manner presentable, Mör turning in a lively track with phased drum sound, backwards tapes and witty voice samples over a passable set of guitar riffs...bouncy fun. 90° South have a slower but equally pleasant and melodic outing. Stylus take us to analogue heaven with some lovely old synth beeps, but ultimately they lack the focus to do more than drift in and drift out without making any real impression. AMP are just awful, a whiney indie girly song of the sort that shoulda died out years ago; while Magnog (of Washington State) are still milking the proggy, languid guitar workout schtick for all its worth...this time with an added violin.

All this is fine and dandy, but it's very derivative - not only of 1970s Krautrock such as Neu!, Klaus Schulze and Ash Ra Tempel, but also of those trendy 1990s bands who have namechecked such bands as influences, such as Tortoise, LaBradford and (inevitably)

the ghastly Stereolab. As such the overall impression I take away is of people who are quick to pick up on the surface sounds, but not the substance of their original sources; and, consequently, what soon becomes apparent is the total lack of ideas and artistic drive that might give any meaning or shape to their work. More to the point, when your sole inspiration for making a record appears to be simply that you have a great collection of *other* records, then it sort of begs the whole question of what makes art important in the first place. Still, what do I know - this beautifully packaged spangly disc, with its smeary abstract blue sleeve, is bound to acquire some kinda trendy status in no time.

ED PINSENT



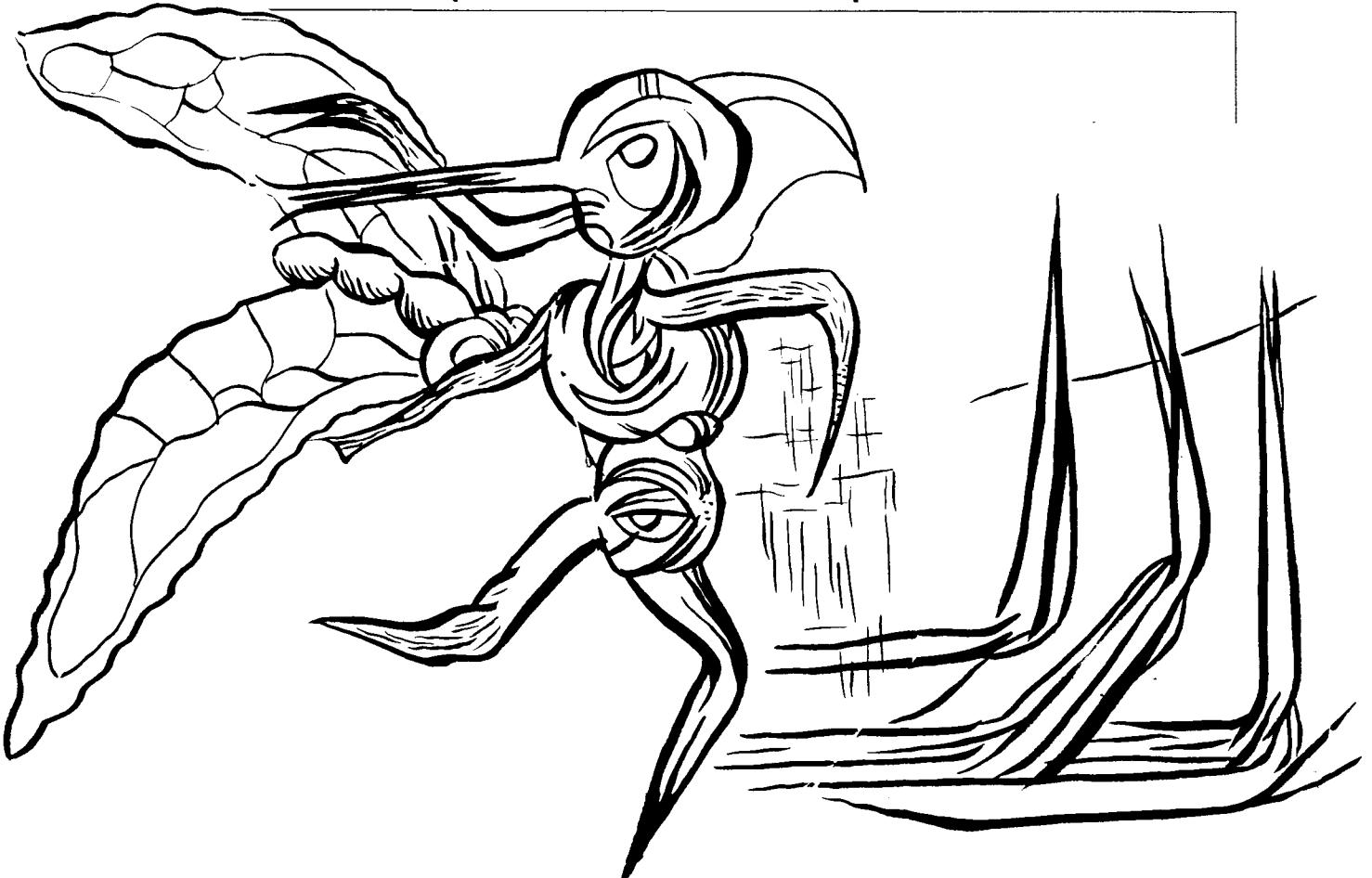
Various Artists

Infrasonic Waves Volume Two 7" EP

OCHRE RECORDS OCH034 (1999)

An enchanting little EP of instrumental music, leaning a bit more on the hippy and space rock angle than the Decalogue record. Magnetophone are very Kraftwerk, very simple; keyboards with backwards tapes for a poignant dissonance, and a reverbed drum machine. Tasty. The Groceries is a solo turn from an Ectogram member, with his acoustic gitar, sitar and Tibetan bowls for all the world resembling a one-man Incredible String Band. Salome, from the USA, comprises selected members of Grumble Grumble and here they play very conventional space rock with echoed guitars and drippy vocals. Our Glassie Azoth generate their usual lovely reverb feedback noises, and a lumber mill working overtime would make less of a racket than they do - it's almost halluigenic.

ED PINSENT



La! Neu? / Die with Dignity
Kraut?

JAPAN, CAPTAIN TRIP
CTCD-098 (1997)

A lot to recommend this CD of what almost amounts to modern Krautrock, recorded in a lesser-known town in Germany by a band of young

and unknown experimentalists who are protégés of Klaus Dinger. They play some decent rock music with guitars, basses and drum machines, and although they sometimes lapse into some dreadfully cloddish rhythm guitar strumming, their plusses are many. There's a very experimental feel, evidenced by their use of found tapes, distorted voices, and electronic effects and treatments. They have some nice valve-operated audio-generators which they feature prominently in photos inside. This harks back to a period when Krautrock might have been genuinely weird and experimental; indeed some tracks here, like 'Phone Call from Brazil', recall the first LP by Faust, even if it's only possessed of one-thousandth of the wildness factor. Another strange feature is the lyrics - I think they're mostly intended as ironic and humorous, but some of them verge on paranoid, angst-ridden, psychologically very distressed tales.

As regards letting the dead die with dignity, there's a track here called 'Are You Sure About It?' which refers, perhaps rather bravely, to those deluded revisionists who try to deny the Holocaust ever happened, and manages fairly successfully to debunk this notion. Good to see Die With Dignity don't align themselves with the New Right youth groups which seem to be springing up in many parts of Europe. On the other hand, there is not one ounce of empathy with the victims of the Nazi regime, indicative of the problem which others have identified: ie the German psyche seems unable to mourn the past with any dignity.

ED PINSENT

Faust

Ravvivando

RER RECOMMENDED FRAV1 (1999)

Faust Wakes Nosferatu

GERMANY, KLANGBAD NO NUMBER CD (1997)

Ravvivando is excellent, a tremendous comeback for Faust and about their most powerful record since they reformed. Since this infamous and largely ill-advised reformation there have been many patchy products and patchier live shows; *Rien De Faust* and the two live CDs on Table of the Elements are, let's face it, pretty disjointed, flabby, and badly recorded. This new one returns to some of features that made them good in the first place, in particular that feel for an endless repetitive monotone thrash that you find on *Faust IV*, *Faust Party* and *Faust So Far*. Perhaps the recent acrimonious falling-out between members has proven to be good thing after all! The bassist, vocalist and guitarist Jean-Hervé Peron no longer features; instead here we have drummer Zappi Diermaier; organist Hans Joachim Irmeler; plus the other team players of this latest Faustian incarnation, Ulrike Helmholz, Steven Wray Lobdell, Lars Paukstat and Michael Stoll.

This record is loud, heavy, and packs an almighty wallop. Most of the tracks follow the two star players, so are organ based or drum based, with a massive feel suggesting each track is hewn from granite; each boulder is flung together by giants, in a

The mossbed of improvisation is

KOSMISCHE Neu Krautrock moderne

pretty much continuous-play suite of musical noise (I think there's only about one break for silence in the whole CD). The noise is liberally dosed with sick-making, disorienting effects - reverb and echo applied like hot tar from a huge tub, phasing, continuous sustained guitar notes, and foreign elements of pure alienation. A sustained production, far better than the wet Jim O'Rourke managed - pumping energy all the time - and forever weird, dark and menacing. And with that uncanny treated tape drum sound thrown in, how can you resist? It's as effective as Massive Attack's meisterwerk of last year, *Mezzanine* - making this an avant-garde Trip-Hop album for sure, without even trying.

Kraftwerk, Can and Klaus Dinger have taken dismaying turns with their approaches to their new audience - and not always produced great music. I had worried pretty much the same about Faust, but there's hope for them yet when they remain capable of music like this, insane, doped-up, true experimenters to the last.

However, no marks at all to *Faust Wakes Nosferatu* - one of the duller records I've heard for a long time. It disguises a near-total lack of ideas with loud volume and endless, pompous droning. It seems disorganised; many of the tracks take too long to get moving; there are too many passages where the whole band seems to have forgotten what they are doing and lost the thread completely. Where the original *Nosferatu* movie (directed by F W Murnau, and released in 1922) has development, drama, tension and narrative closure, this music has none of the above. I hate to make too many comparisons, but there seems little other justification for this music's existence. It was created live, alongside a screening of the film; they call it an 'interpretation' of the film. The lineup is once again Irmeler and Diermaier, with Steven Wray Lobdell on Thomas C Martin on guitars, and Lars Paukstat on 'zither and labyrinth percussion'. Not good.

ED PINSENT

La! Neu?

Gold Regen (Gold Rain)

JAPAN, CAPTAIN TRIP CTCD-123 (1998)

Since the house is now bulging with a surfeit of recent Klaus Dinger product, I find this one the most acceptable of the batch and will probably leave the other records - including *Year of the Tiger* Captain Trip CTCD-124, to be reviewed some other time. Like similar

releases from last year, this one features the Dinger family and associated friends having a sing-song at home - sounds of friendly chatter included, and a tape recorder that doesn't start on time. They gather around the grand piano played by Rembrandt Lensink, with some scrappy violin added by brother Thomas, and out of tune vocals mostly by the lamentable Viktoria Wehrmeister. In all it's sombre in tone, even moving at times - suggesting the ancient Germanic romancing of forest and mountain, only applied to autobahn and factory-works. So, either thematically or musically, Dinger's recent work is in no way an improvement on Neu! and La Düsseldorf's fine recordings, and this is far from being a necessary release.

ED PINSENT



The Sound Projector Sixth issue 1999

Bluepoint Underground

In New York City

JAPAN, CAPTAIN TRIP CTCD-161 (1999)

While the old Marvel Comics character Captain America always seemed to have an insatiable hunger for stomping the Nazi ratzis, Captain Trip (whoever he may be) seems to yearn with similar severity for anything related to the musical output of Klaus Dinger. I don't know if Klaus Dinger's mum, pets or chiropodist have done albums, but if they have, I'll bet I know where to get them. This lot seem to be a group whom Mr Dinger has taken under his wing by recording and producing a studio version of what was once a live art event thingie.

I'll have to confess that much of this is kind of on the limits of my area of experience, and interest. It's all a bit too arts-lab-krautrock-cum-jazz-workshop, so being as it was recorded in Germany, the title *In New York City* has a sense of logic that probably isn't intended. In New York City as in 'my analyst is so happy that after the free expression drama workshop I was able to look deep inside myself and realise that I'm me, and this "me" is a person who lives in New York City.' I keep expecting Lisa Simpson to pop up with a few haikus on world peace.

Leaving my possibly jaundiced opinions aside for a moment in the name of objectivity, the music is fairly acceptable when free of irritating vocals of the kind that are praised as groundbreaking and of world-wide significance by *Guardian* journalists, and the other 49 people who think that choreography and avant-garde cookery are important. There's a wide variety of sounds, instruments and moods on here, but little that really does it for me. Perhaps if that bloody woman would button it every once in a while instead of caterwauling away like Yoko Ono getting suddenly into a scalding hot bath, I might have time to discover whether the music is anything to write home about. If I'm to be honest, I don't think I really care enough to find out. This might be a valued addition to some CD collections, but not to mine.

WAR ARROW

1-A Düsseldorf

Fettleber

JAPAN, CAPTAIN TRIP CTCD-160 (1999)

I've only heard a handful of Captain Trip releases and at last I've found one that isn't a side project, live performance, archive material, rarities, assorted left overs, or Klaus Dinger having a bath and recording the event for posterity (although admittedly 'Shit! I've dropped The Soap' (0'45") from *Long Hot Soak Volume 7* was a tour de force). This actually sounds like a proper album, as in something to be listened to rather than just added to a collection.

1-A Düsseldorf is Thomas Dinger (of Neu! and La Düsseldorf) and Nils Kristiansen. That is to say this is the latest work by Thomas Dinger, rather than an album by Thomas Dinger who did stuff in the 1970s and is still soldiering on, which is a subtly different definition. My only real criticism is that sometimes the vocals are mixed a bit louder than they need to be, on occasions threatening to reduce the music, particularly the percussion, to the status of a backing track. But leaving this minor point aside, it's top quality all the way. Although reliant to a degree on droning guitar, sequencer, and repetition, as have been his earlier records, this particular Dinger boy seems keen to experiment and try out new angles and approaches, which explains the overall quality of freshness and originality. At a guess I'd say Thomas Dinger has yet to lose the sense of exciting possibilities that must present themselves at the door of the recording studio. Where many others who've been doing it this long end up repeating old tricks in an attempt to stimulate a flagging organ into emulating its former fertility, old Tom's yet to suffer from that particular problem, if you'll pardon the double entendre. *Fettleber*, meaning 'Fat Liver', doesn't sound much like those early La Düsseldorf albums, but I am reminded of why I found them so exciting in the first place.

WAR ARROW

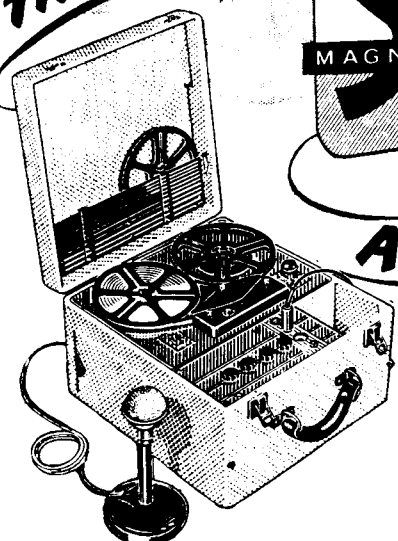
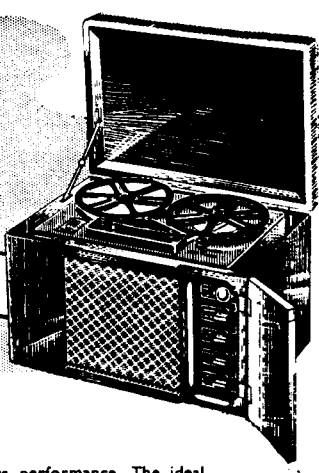


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Opaque

DENTAL RECORDS OPA-001 (1999)

Bloody fine - nice to hear some music with a pair of balls for a change. Any fans of Head Of David, Sonic Youth and other dissonant guitar groups should form an orderly queue right here. Retro it may be, but it's a heroic noise. Opaque are a local Lancaster band who have evolved from playing together in a local community rehearsal room: this was recorded in Leeds last December. Three tracks on this self-produced artefact, the longest coming in at fifteen minutes, and you can hear throughout the struggle they're having to play decently and keep it all going as they compete against each other with screees of insane twittering feedback, synth blasts, very basic drumming, a vile sawtooth bass guitar, lead guitar stabs, and an overall grinding relentlessness. And of course, the sound levels are unbalanced and messy. Great! These rough edges are essential and mostly what gives the music any dynamic and energy at all; one fears that if they ever got any better at playing, they might lose this altogether. Best pick up on this very heavy noise fest while you still can.

ED PINSENT

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Splintered

Noumena

FOURTH DIMENSION / SUGGESTION / AMANITA : FDCD60 / SUG16 / AMA41 (1998)

My previous experience of this group is of a collaborative polycarbonate biscuit with RLW which is overlong, tedious and uneventful. So it didn't come as too much of a shock that this opens with the same unimpressive collage of noodling distorted sound, with far too much echo and too little volume. Crap and weedy, but my collection of silver polycarbonate drinks coasters will soon be unrivalled in the Western hemisphere.

And then, just as I've gotten comfy on my preconceptions, with cushions of anticipated scathing criticism arranged just so, the unexpected happens. A deep rumbling bass, portentous as the revving of a motorbike, and ponderous drumming that suggests waves crashing majestically into granite promontories, emerges from beneath the soundscape. The effect is unexpected and powerful: what initially seems to be an exercise in pointless ambient toilet water suddenly doubles in size and grows horns, mutating into full-on sonic mindfuck before your very ears. This is in fact what I'd hoped Splintered might sound like before having such expectations slapped around the head by the disc mentioned earlier.

And so it carries on in similar vein for the other six tracks: rumbling fudge-punching basslines and stadium scale drumming happily jamming along to guitar noise and vocal lines that have been overdubbed and echoed into a glorious and messy oblivion. It is something of a cliché to say that listening to such and such is rather like gazing into the abyss, and a cliché I expect I've used on a number of occasions myself. Apart from anything, what

the hell can such a silly statement possibly mean? The abyss? Which abyss would that be? In this case, the abyss in question is the one that opens up on this disc, releasing monstrosities which threaten to ensnare the listener and suck his brains out via his fundament. I realise this may appear to be a rather melodramatic claim to make for what is after all, just a shiny bit of plastic that documents a bunch of guys playing songs, but I dare you to listen to *Noumena* and call me a liar.

WAR ARROW

Cosmonauts Hail Satan

Cape Cannibal Skull Island Apocalypse

WILL MONTGOMERY RECORDS / AMANITA WMR002 / AMA43 (1998)

Loud guitar. Lots of echo. Lots of feedback. Vaguely tribal drums. Basic recording quality and loads and loads of croaky old bits of B-movie dialogue. Bang. Drone. Screech. Bang. Drone. Screech.

¡Madre de Dios! It pains me to be such a great big Mr Grumpy-Drawers but...MAN! This hums! Okay, I'll admit it isn't completely lacking in charm. As a poor cousin to Terminal Cheesecake and the like it does a job to the best of its limited abilities. There's some nice effects, particularly the looped sample on '73 Diabolically Implanted Autosuggestions'. If this was a cassette one might even be moved to praise the half-decent recording quality. But...

...aren't you lot bored of this sort of thing yet? I know I certainly am. Feedback, grungey echo, backwards guitars and of course snatches of dialogue from rubbish films and programmes about flying saucers. Zombies. Satan. Blah blah blah...all with that authentic America circa 1957 feel. Hmmm. Isn't it weird that no-one does this kind of stuff using old bits of dialogue from *Dixon of Dock Green* or *Top of the Farm*? Sure. Americans going on about aliens are funny, but get over it. Please. It wouldn't even be so bad if this lot were Americans sending up their own lurid

NOISY ROCK

pop culture, but they're not. They're from Leeds!

Ultimately this is no more radical than a Levis jeans advert, because let's face it, an obsession with fifties Americana in all its silliness informs both. All this 'blah blah Elvis Satan ha ha Manson 666 Liberace' stuff is camper than a row of pink tents full of drag queens waiting for the Judy Garland convention to open its doors. In 1969 this album might have sounded pretty groundbreaking, but in 1999 I fail to see why anyone would care enough to put it on CD. *Cape Cannibal Skull Island Apocalypse* - oh yes, highly amusing. I'll bet they just don't know what they'll do next.

WAR ARROW

Menstruation Sisters

Ma

AUSTRALIA, SYNAESTHESIA NO NUMBER CD

A ludicrous cassette-standard release pasted onto CD format, this offers little more than childish breast-beating and tantrum throwing. When I see children turning purple with rage when they can't get their own way, I'm never quite sure what to do; when I see their parents reacting with an angry cuff round their offspring's ear, then I rage against the repression and gloom in this miserable country that produces such bad parenting, and feeds these bad attitudes down from generation to generation. I'm not being patronizing, but in my bleak moments I imagine we're breeding monsters every day. The net result is inarticulate yobs, who can only find expression in drinking themselves senseless until they realise there's nothing to express anyway. Another reflexive action resulting from this endless loop of futile behaviour is to go and make records like this one by the Menstruation Sisters; they have nothing to express, and succeed in expressing it very badly. I'm thinking now of the footage I have seen of caged circus animals, kept in such miserable conditions that they lapse into 'stereotypes', that is limited actions like moving the same limb back and forth in a

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meaningless pattern until their brains are screaming for mercy. Which brings us to the choice of imagery used by Menstruation Sisters, the famous old engraving of hairy sideshow freaks. The music, by the way, is just feedback and drum-bashing piffle executed with some half-hearted idea that it's shocking or challenging in some way. Pull the other one!

ED PINSENT

SLAB!

Descension

USA, RELEASE RR6462 (1999)

Not since before Self Indulgent Wank's manager convinced their singer Jim Morrison to change the name has a group's appellation

provided such a rudely onomatopoeic translation of their music. SLAB! (it doesn't look right in lower case) were the aural equivalent of having concrete blocks dropped on you from a great height. This is a reissue of the debut by these long gone pioneers of monolithic sonic brutality. They first came together way back in 1985, and as the sleeve note reports, were often compared with artists like the Swans, to name but one. No kidding. Although *Descension* is too original in outlook to be labelled as a copy of some else, there's no denying it's basically the Swans' *Cop* album that you can dance to. Merciless jackhammer drums drive a dark funky bass head on into tinnitus-inducing layers of guitar and noise. I think you get the picture, but before the paint sets let's not forget the anomalous insertions of free jazz,

complete with a cat (of the feline rather than beatnik variety) running up and down the keys of a piano. I have to confess that such interludes leave me flopping around like a fish out of water, specifically a fish that's capable of vocalising the three words 'what', 'the' and 'fuck!' But confusion permitting, it still seems true to its own twisted internal logic. If you missed out on SLAB! (although in mind of the concrete block analogy earlier, it'd probably be more accurate to say if they missed you) and you have a taste for early Swans, Killing Joke, or anyone else whose music suggests impending and terrible doom, then you really can't afford to let this one pass you by.

WAR ARROW



Skipload of T-a-p-e-s

Various Artists

The Same Place

NEVIS RECORDS ERAS200 C90 (19998)

No address or other details accompanied this mysterious artefact containing a scant 14 minutes or so of noises and suchlike by Jonathan Loris, Andy Loris, The Sharple, D.I.S.G., and Ears. The last two have solo tapes available from Nevis Records, although where or what they may be I couldn't tell you. Thus, deprived of fuel for pithy prejudices based upon potential Canadian origin, or pictures of dead bad guys on the cover, I'm reluctantly forced to write about it on the strength of the music alone. Which isn't easy, as there's so little of it.

Most of *The Same Place* seems to have been recorded on a mono portable cassette machine using the 'lads mucking about in a garage' approach to home recording. There's a smattering of weirdo tape stuff, some wilfully peculiar songs, and a cover of the *Coronation Street* theme tune (no credit given to composer Eric Spear I note, rather testily) performed by The Sharple, whom I rather suspect ISN'T Peter Gabriel operating under an alias in order to compose unhindered by misconceptions which could arise, were this to be associated with his more mainstream output. Containing roughly 14 minutes of music (6 short tracks), *The Same Place* is almost too modest to arouse anger. Although a full tape might prove unbearable, in such humble portions the tracks are fairly listenable, and even entertaining while they last. One number, sung with a phoney hillbilly lilt, degenerates into a discussion about whether or not bananas shatter when dropped, which probably paints a more vivid picture of how *The Same Place* sounds than anything I could squirt from the keyboard of my word processor.

Aural Guerrilla

Sick to Death...

C30 (1999)

You may remember Jim MacDougall's previous effort as reviewed in issue 3 of this periodical. Anyway, he's been at it again and produced a tape with a title that's too long and unprintable for a family magazine such as what this is. Whatever he's been up to since *Magical Moments* has made for a strengthening and a refinement of his abilities. Once again the music is a little bit Joy Division, a little bit Chrome, and with a smattering of Genesis P. Orrible doing his Mark E Smith impersonation. Production-wise, you can almost see your face

in it, which although perhaps too clean for some tastes, delivers the kick one might expect from the paratrooper's shiny size-fifteens that I've somehow managed to wangle into this sentence.

In recent times Jim seems to have taken on the role of poet rather than singer, and therein lies his true strength. His narratives are mildly disturbing at best, and often quite alarming, but the power of his voice and imagination draw the listener in with the same apparent ease one associates with the finest



of his contemporaries. After all, it is only when someone doesn't quite have it that you notice how hard they're trying.

Perhaps the key to Jim's success is that what with his psychiatric background, documented (after a fashion) here, it's fairly obvious he doesn't write this stuff simply for something to do between brunch with old varsity chums and taking in the latest Merchant-Ivory costume drama. It sounds like a matter of survival, scrubbing away at old mental war wounds, as much as anything else. So it is admirable that such a compelling soundtrack is the result, particularly where it would be all too easy to produce the aural, or perhaps literary equivalent of a dirty protest.

If you can't be arsed to check this out, it may be worth noting that of late Jim has taken to giving the occasional live performance in and

around the East London area, and in the sort of venues that I know at least some of you lot frequent. Failing that, he has several collections of his writings available. Notable are *My Catholic Enemy* and *Pornography*, both of which work on paper in pretty much the same way as *Sick...* does on ferric oxide.

Aural Guerrilla, Flat 5, 2 Earham Drive,
Forest Gate, London E7 9AL, UK

Various Artists

New Hippies Volume One

RED NEON TAPES RN1 C60

New Hippies Volume Two

RED NEON TAPES RN8 C60

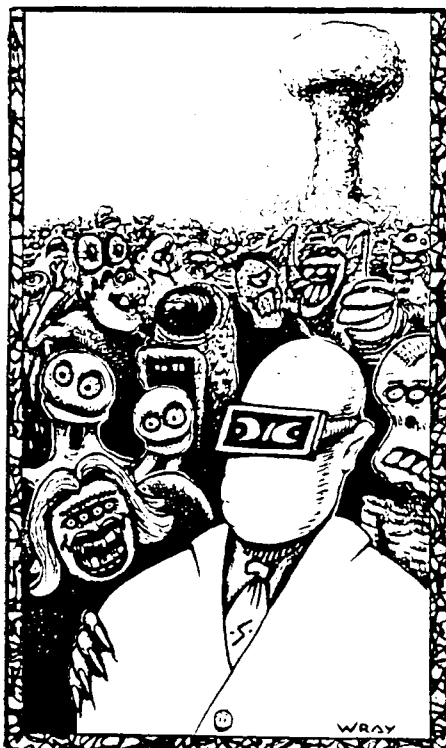
In their time Red Neon have released works from all eight corners of the er...quality cube. On the one hand we have masterpieces of unparalleled quite-good-ness such as Pol Silentblock's *Pour Le Sourire D'Alexia*, and on the other, there was that fucking tape by The Moth which still stands as a turd-encrusted yardstick by which all other pointless and crappy endeavours must be measured. So as one might suspect, these compilations are pretty eclectic in terms of the quality of contributors.

Firstly, it should be pointed out that the sound quality is excellent throughout, and easily on a par with something you might have taped off a CD. This allows the finer tracks to truly shine without having to battle through a wall of hiss and distortion. That said, the fact that folks such as The Cure and The Lighthouse Family opt not to release their doings on car boot sale cassettes via the gift of the 1976 Alba brand mono portable tape recorder doesn't necessarily mean they aren't wasting everyone's time, and this simple truth applies equally well here.

The good stuff ranges from listenable to pretty darn good. It's largely electronic and rhythmic, often with a subtle pop sensibility. Sort of Front 242 in a better mood. Hermanos Guzanos, DSIP, and the ubiquitous M. Nomized all turn in accomplished and atmospheric numbers that I'd happily listen to again. But of course such quality is not easily achieved; indeed it requires effort and comes with a heavy price. In this case the price paid by the listener is having to sit through The Residents meet The Teletubbies drivel of Sha 261...and The Golozos, who I suspect believe themselves to be Tuxedo Moon when really they are only Shell Suit Meteorite. Listening to some of this tape's darker moments, I can almost see *Eurotrash's* wooden giraffe things, Pee-Pee and Po-Po, being gesticulated in rhythmic accompaniment. But I suspect even Antoine and his producers would turn their noses aloft at such unredeemable Eurocheese.

In summary, despite harsh words above, these are pretty commendable collections. The good stuff is well worth a few minutes of anyone's time. The bad stuff makes for fine if lurid entertainment when in the grip of alcoholic merriment, particularly if you invite your friends around and pretend to really like it. What swings it is that Red Neon, unless I've been misled, seem happy to swap tapes, which not only saves the aggro of converting currencies and so on, but also means you can take a chance and the worst case scenario is

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no more severe than having a cassette to tape something else on.

Red Neon, c/o Patrick Parent, 76 Rue Wayenburg, 1040 Bruxelles, Belgium

Pandemic Third Spacing C74 (1999)

This probably shouldn't be in here, seeing as it's actually intended for release on CD at some point, but seeing as this issue isn't exactly awash with tapes (I suppose you all do it on your fancy Internet webs nowadays) and this is a gem, what the heck! Pandemic is one chap with a Moog synthesiser and some primitive effects plugged into a home stereo, and in terms of production it STILL beats plenty of things I've heard come out of a 16 track studio. Menacing drones appear to be the order of the day, seasoned with a smattering of grunge noises, piercing squeals, and disembodied voices. Rather like the manner in which Linx, the Sontaran scout from the final

episode of the *Doctor Who* classic 'The Time Warrior' as broadcast on the 5th January 1974, was dealt with by a pointed implement rudely introduced to his probic vent, Pandemic have made something which is highly effective almost by virtue of its simplicity. As might be evident, I've come across more than my fair share of one-geezer-and-his-droning-racket tapes in my time, and the fact that Pandemic can travel the same road as a million others, whilst still producing something that sounds fresh and genuinely unsettling is a very pleasant surprise. When *Third Spacing* sees the light of day, chances are it won't be on EMI or Epic or any other label that you'd find in the local branch of Woolworths, so keep your eyes peeled and your ears open.

**The Skip reviewed
by WAR ARROW**

★★★★★★★★★★★★
**SKIPLOAD OF
TAPES
COMPETITION!**
★★★★★★★★★★★★

Hats off to Steve Prescott of Hampshire who answered 'Marzipan', 'Mark Mothersbaugh' and 'Atauhualpa'. The third answer should've been Huascar, but wor lad at least admitted he wasn't absolutely certain, and more importantly even though it was the wrong answer, he spelt it right. Furthermore, Steve's response to our tie-breaker (which wasn't really necessary as it turned out) was that MC

Hammer 'deserves time in the slammer'. It rhymes and, by the Lord Harry, it's true. Enjoy the tapes, Steve!

So, this time, if you've a mind to win the cassettes described above all you need do is send your name and address on something marked 'Skipload of Tapes Pitiful Competition' to the editorial address, with answers to the following:

1. Which member of The Cravats, The Very Things, Grimetime, and the slightly more reclusive Piston Smash and The Morning Dobermen has appeared on *Knowing Me Knowing You with Alan Partridge*, and once played a washing machine delivery geezer in an episode of *The Bill*?
2. What animal's breakfast is paid musical tribute by Ramleh on their wistful and sensitive Christopher Cross-esque album *Blowhole*?
3. When (roughly) is it thought that the Anasazi culture of the South Western United States cashed in its collective chips?

...and to help us decide between the millions of winning entries that will doubtlessly log-jam our box number for months to come, a tie-breaker. In no more than five words, or thereabouts, tell us who you think would win in a punch-up between Charles Mingus and Art Blakey, and why.

★★★★★★★★★★★★

AURALGUERRILLA
sickto deathwhenispe
akabouttodaywitht
heirhateigaveallthe
bloodandnowtheyhav
ethegravediggerdrin
kingmymilkandshittin
ginmybedsorrytheold
smiledashelickedthe

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**+ I CAN'T SEE NO REASON
BURN OUT THE DAY
BURN OUT THE NIGHT!
+ PUT UP A FIGHT**